

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



August 2014

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THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON THE *Oneness of the Universe*

In this universe, there is one continuous substance on every plane of existence. Physically this universe is one: there is no difference between the sun and you. The scientist will tell you it is only a fiction to say the contrary. There is no real difference between the table and me; the table is one point in the mass of matter, and I another point. Each form represents, as it were, one whirlpool in the finite ocean of matter, of which not one is constant. Just as in a rushing stream there may be millions of whirlpools, the water in each of which is different every moment, turning round and round for a few seconds, and then passing out replaced by a fresh quantity, so the whole universe is one constantly changing mass of matter, in which all forms of existence are so many whirlpools. A mass of matter enters into one whirlpool, say a human body, stays there for a period, becomes changed, and goes out into another, say an animal body this time, from which again after a few years, it enters into another whirlpool, called a lump of mineral. It is a constant change. Not one body is constant. There is no such thing as my body, or your body, except in words. Of the one huge mass of matter, one point is called a moon, another a sun, another a man, another the earth, another a plant, another a mineral. Not one is constant, but everything is changing, matter eternally concreting and disintegrating. So it is with the mind. Matter



is represented by the ether; when the action of Prana is most subtle, this very ether, in the finer state of vibration, will represent the mind, and there it will be still one unbroken mass. If you can simply get to that subtle vibration, you will see and feel that the whole universe is composed of subtle vibrations. Many of you may remember the celebrated experiment of Sir Humphrey Davy, when the laughing gas overpowered him—how, during the lecture, he remained motionless, and, after that, he said that the whole universe was made up of ideas. For the time being, as it were, the gross vibrations had ceased, and only the subtle vibrations which he called ideas, were present to him. He could only see the subtle vibrations round him; everything had become thought; the whole universe was an ocean of thought, he and everyone else had become little thought whirlpools. Thus, even in the universe of thought we find unity, and at last, when we get to the Self, we know that self can only be One.

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Contents

Traditional Wisdom	459
This Month	460
Editorial: True Spirituality	461
The Spiritual Practice of Sri Ramakrishna	463
Swami Pavitrnananda	
Tantra and the Sri Vidya	471
Pradeep Kumar Pandey	
The Sri Chakra:	475
A Blend of Science and Mythology	
G Siva Reddy	
The Sands of Performance	478
Carolyn Roark	
Search for Meaning through Prayer	487
Swami Satyamayananda	
Swami Vivekananda's Words on Vedanta	491
Swami Aparananda	
Eternal Words	497
Swami Adbhutananda	
Reviews	501
Reports	505

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TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राथ वरान्निबोधत ।

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

The Boat of Knowledge

August 2014
Vol. 119, No. 8

Acharya Shankara

विज्ञान नौका

तपोयज्ञदानादिभिः शुद्धबुद्धिर्विरक्तो नृपादौ पदे तुच्छबुद्ध्या ।
परित्यज्य सर्वं यदाप्नोति तत्त्वं परं ब्रह्म नित्यं तदेवाहमस्मि ॥ १ ॥

*Tapo-yajna-danadibhih shuddha-buddhir-
virakto nripadau pade tuchchha-buddhya*

*Parityajya sarvam yadapnoti tattvam
param brahma nityam tadevahasmi* (1)

By performing austerities, sacrifices, charity, and the like, purifying the mind, and practising dispassion by considering as insignificant, positions like that of a king—the principle that I attain [by doing all these and] by giving up everything, I am indeed that same [principle], supreme eternal Brahman.

दयालुं गुरुं ब्रह्मनिष्ठं प्रशांतं समाराध्य भक्त्या विचार्य स्वरूपम् ।
यदाप्नोति तत्त्वं निदिध्यास्य विद्वान् परं ब्रह्म नित्यं तदेवाहमस्मि ॥ २ ॥

*Dayalum gurum brahmanishtham prashantam
samaradhya bhaktya vicharya svarupam*

*Yadapnoti tattvam nididhyasya vidvan
param brahma nityam tadevahasmi* (2)

By properly worshipping with devotion the compassionate, tranquil guru [who is] established in Brahman, and by contemplating on [one's] true nature, the principle that a wise person attains by meditating upon it, I am indeed that same [principle], supreme eternal Brahman.

THIS MONTH

THE TERM 'SPIRITUALITY' MEANS different things to different people. It is as though spirituality is suffering from an 'identity crisis'. **True Spirituality** attempts to situate this term in line with the understanding derived from Advaita Vedanta texts. Spirituality can be understood only by spiritual practice. Sri Ramakrishna showed us that it is possible to do it even in the present age. Swami Pavitrananda, former Minister-in-charge, Vedanta Society of New York, paints a detailed picture of **The Spiritual Practice of Sri Ramakrishna**. This is an edited transcript of a talk delivered in 1957.

Spirituality is often sought through ritual worship by many people, and it is this ritualistic dimension that makes religion meaningful to them. In **Tantra and the Sri Vidya**, Pradeep Kumar Pandey, a scholar of environmental science, writes about the worship of the Divine in feminine form and also in the form of a diagrammatic representation of the goddess, Sri Yantra. This worship is significant in that it channelizes the innate human weakness of desire and transforms it into the desire for divinity.

Design and structure give a concrete shape and direction to abstract thoughts. The shape of the Sri Chakra and its symbology helps the worshipper to contemplate on the goddess and progress towards the fulfilment of one's spiritual practices. Siva Reddy, Professor of Chemistry, Yogi Vemana University, describes **The Sri Chakra: A Blend of Science and Mythology**. He explains the geometrical aspects of the Sri

Chakra and traces the use of similar symbology in other religions and faith systems. The influence of the Sri Chakra is better appreciated when we understand its influence on religions other than Hinduism. Carolyn Roark, founding editor of the *Ecumenica Journal*, traces the art and spirituality of Buddhist mandalas in **The Sands of Performance**. She brings to us a detailed description of how precise, beautiful, and contemplative these mandalas are, and how they are as much pieces of exquisite art as places and occasions for deep meditation. The Buddha talked about suffering and the way out of it. Religion, in general, is meant to be a way out of suffering. This way out is through the search for meaning in life and the surroundings we find ourselves in. Swami Satyamayananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Kanpur, follows this **Search for Meaning through Prayer**. He delineates the importance of prayer as a fulfilling spiritual practice that can lead to self-realization.

Swami Vivekananda was one of the finest messengers of the gospel of Vedanta. Swami Aparananda, Minister-in-charge, Vedanta Society of Berkeley, analyses **Swami Vivekananda's Words on Vedanta** and gives an inkling of the breadth of the message of Vedanta and its unique interpretation by Swamiji. The realization taught by Vedanta can only be achieved by spiritual practice as advised by Swami Adbhutananda in the twenty-first part of **Eternal Words**. The swami's words are translated from Sat Katha published from Udbodhan Office, Kolkata.

EDITORIAL

True Spirituality

SPIRITUALITY IS THE BUZZWORD today. Or at least its talk is. It is surprising how many people can talk of things without having the least idea about them. Everything is considered spiritual today—soothing music, a refreshing trip to a hill-station, even a feel-good movie! Are we missing the point here? All this leads to the obvious question: What is spirituality?

Spirituality can be best defined as something that does not concern the material. And this definition makes the idea of spirituality all the more incomprehensible. We are constantly dabbling in duality, grappling with sense objects, objects having name and form and distinctly material. Most of us are blissfully unaware of anything even remotely spiritual. We eat, drink, laugh, play, work, read, think, and sometimes meditate. All these actions start and mostly end in the realm of the material. The farthest end of human expression is nothing but the subtlest form of the material. Our very existence is in the material world. This brings us to the same question again: What is meant by 'spiritual'?

The phenomena that take place around us daily are those that we fail to notice properly. Human advances in knowledge have not yet unravelled the secrets of death, or for that matter, even that of sleep. How is it that the same body with all the hardware of a living person goes kaput on death? Where does the software reside? Years of ruminations have given us only different names. Fancy though such names are, they explain nothing. To make us understand the spiritual, teachers give us material examples.

Knowledge eludes us with the collusion of ignorance. We end at the beginning. This happens because the very idea of understanding, or even an idea itself, is material, because mind—the place where all ideas originate—is itself material. Hence, we can never express spirituality. Such a thing could never happen and even positing such a possibility is absurd.

This being so, how does one cultivate spirituality? The best method probably would be to avoid that which is not spiritual, or that which is material. This practice has been there for ages in almost all religions. This method has worked well for humanity and has produced spiritual giants. However, denial of what is seen could also lead to turning a blind eye to suffering. And that is why it is necessary to understand that what is seen is an illusory reflection of the principle behind the sight. I exist because of the spirit, and the material existence is illusory. Of course, 'spirit' would mean here Atman in the Vedantic sense and nothing else. Rooted in the knowledge of my innermost spirit, I may appreciate the colours of the illusory material exterior, but an ignorant assertion of the external colours alone would take me away from my nature, the spirit, and would make me non-spiritual.

This means that we should not assert our material existence, because there is none. We are not bodies, we are not minds: we are the free spirit. Our beauty does not lie in the amount of cosmetics we apply to our skins, but in the depth of conviction we have in the fact that births and deaths are just passing phases in our efforts to free ourselves

from the cycles of transmigration. Spirituality is our true nature, and truth itself is true spirituality. Why do we get upset when we lose material things like a car, a mobile phone, or a computer? Because we identify ourselves with the material. This identification is at the root of all ignorant actions. Our identification with actions and possessions is what keeps us away from Self-knowledge.

How will a spiritual person behave? Committed but unperturbed. Such a person will do everything with the utmost concentration and yet remain unperturbed at anything that happens because of the understanding that the material is not one's true nature or true spirituality. The illusoriness of the apparent and the permanence of the real are the only concerns of a spiritual person. But then, how will that person respond to human suffering? Human suffering too is undoubtedly illusory, but if one can perceive suffering, one becomes part of that illusion and has to respond with empathy to suffering. If there is no empathetic response, that person resorts to the untruth of not having perceived the suffering and goes away from one's true nature, truth itself. Only when a person is inseparably merged with the absolute Consciousness does suffering become imperceptible. In other words, if I can be a spiritual person and appreciate or enjoy the picturesque beauty of the Himalayas, I should also be able to humanely respond to the suffering of my fellow-beings. If I cannot do that, I am not spiritual but a hypocrite.

Look around yourself, at your family, at your society, and at your country. What do you see? Everyone is constantly going away from their true spiritual nature. Blame it on whatever agency you may, people are being told everyday that they are bodies, bodies, and only bodies. Partly engineered out of desire, partly the outcome of foolishness, this tendency of asserting only the physical dimension of the human

personality has turned us into mere reflectors of the material, while in truth, the bodies are the exact opposite—mere illusory reflections of the spirit. What we need to do now is not to post self-portraits on social networking sites and debase ourselves, but to constantly focus on our real nature: pure, luminous, and conscious. Why should we do that? Not just because it has been told by our ancestors, though that is a good reason in itself, but also because such thought gives strength, courage, and self-confidence to face the problems of life and beyond, and that is what we were meant to do in the first place. We came to this world to find out what went wrong that made us fall into this den of duality. What went wrong in the undifferentiated infinite ocean of Consciousness that there arose differentiations and quarrels about them? We need to look at ourselves not in a mirror of glass but in the mirror of our self, the mirror of the spirit, the mirror of the Atman. How does darkness envelop light? How does ignorance cover knowledge? These, and not the petty doings of politicians, should be the subject of our ruminations.

We need to wake up from the deep slumber of ignorance and duality. Such living becomes more miserable as we are completely oblivious to our true identity. True spirituality is not about affirmation of the seen but the realization of the conscious spirit behind the scene. What you eat or wear is not more important than maintaining truthfulness. The universe is illusory only as it appears, but it is quite real in its essence—Consciousness. We need to be constantly aware of this Consciousness, we need to be constantly blissful and be beyond all material dualities of pain and pleasure. Cultivating this equanimity is true spirituality. And that attitude comes after a lot of effort, practice of years, or even several lifetimes, but it is possible. Let us all make an effort to be truly spiritual!



The Spiritual Practice of Sri Ramakrishna

Swami Pavitrananda

WE ARE ALL MEMBERS of human-kind, but we belong to different grades of humanity. Some are still on the borderline between the animal level and the human level. Some are on the human level because they try to improve, spiritually and morally. Some succeed. Them we call persons of God. But there are some human beings whom we call God-men. We say God first and man next because they rise so high that we do not know exactly whether we should call them human beings or gods. They transcend the limits of human beings. One may say, 'Why do you bring in that mystical idea?' In ordinary life, let us say in science, a scientist becomes very great. There is not another like that scientist in perhaps two or three centuries. But we do not call that person supernatural. He or she is just a human being. Others aspire to be like that person.

And, you may think that the same thing applies to art and literature. The scientist discovers more about physical nature; the artist creates things of art, writes beautiful poetry and drama. But there is a difference, for here a person is trying to evolve oneself out of the human level. If we believe in the law of evolution, as most of us do, we say that human beings came from the level of lower animals, say apes. But no longer do you call a human being an ape; that person has evolved out of that. That person has transcended the limitations of the lower animal species.

In the same way, when in the process of evolution, a person transcends completely the limitations of human beings; you can no more say that such a person belongs to any species. That

person has become too highly evolved. It is not a question of gathering information about nature or creating things of art. It is a new step in the process of evolution. Fortunately for us, there are some such great souls whom we cannot call mere human beings. We call them God-men.

There is a great deal of difference between ordinary persons and God-men. To cite from Christian theology, it is the difference between Christ himself and the Christian saints such as Saint Francis of Assisi or Saint Teresa of Avila. Even the teacher of Christ, John the Baptist, admitted this: 'He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear'¹, or 'the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose'². There have been other great souls who belonged to the same class as Christ. We cannot call them ordinary saints, who rose to that height. There was something special about them. They were a mixture of human and divine qualities.

Some people are a mixture of the brute and the angel. Some persons deliberately try to keep others on that level, and some people like to live on that lower level. Hitler said, 'I want to see once more in its [youth's] eyes the gleam of pride and independence of the beast of prey'.³ Would you call these people human although they have the human form? On the contrary, some persons are so exalted spiritually and morally, that it is unbelievable that a human being could rise so high.

It is not just about whether such people are God-men. Neither is it about the glory of their being or their great spiritual achievements. For

ordinary spiritual seekers, what is important is how they climbed up the steep path and rose to such a height. The general tendency is to enjoy the beauty of the peak, not to climb up, because that means toil and labour. Rather one should find out how to climb up. The devotees do not like to see any imperfection in great souls, and perhaps that is why they overlook the struggle, which is so important to know about.

In the Bhagavadgita, Arjuna asks a practical and human question: 'What is the description of a person of steady wisdom merged in samadhi. How does such person speak, sit, and behave?'⁴ It is possible that due to passage of time, we have lost many episodes of their spiritual struggles. Also, the details were probably not correctly recorded or preserved. In Christ's life, it is said that he performed spiritual disciplines in the wilderness for forty days, after which he began to preach. But the details of his life from age twelve to thirty are not available. The crucial thing to know is what he did during that time.

Dakshineswar Kali Temple



His struggle was not just for forty days, but for many days and years before that, which we need to know about. Similarly, Buddha's final struggle before illumination was for about six months. He had to wrestle the human frailties.

Fortunately Sri Ramakrishna lived in the modern age, surrounded by sceptics and agnostics. Western civilization had influenced India then, particularly Calcutta, the erstwhile capital of British India. The fad then was to be sceptical and agnostic. Eventually, Sri Ramakrishna made some of his disciples from such apparent sceptics and agnostics, who later recorded his spiritual struggle. These people did not have devotion to begin with, but had a critical eye and modern education. The characteristics of modern education are to challenge and to discern whether things are true. These disciples had a historical sense and recorded events correctly. They also evolved into spiritual luminaries. Thus, in the case of Sri Ramakrishna, we have the advantage of accurately documented history.

Writing the biography of a spiritual personality is fraught with difficulties, because to understand such a person one has to rise to an equal stature. This is seldom possible. Girishchandra Ghosh once requested Swami Vivekananda to write a biography of Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Vivekananda declined: 'Shall I make the image of a monkey while trying to make that of Shiva?' That was his sentiment. He did not write but other disciples did, from whose conversations too we know more

about Sri Ramakrishna. It is notable that these disciples were not naïve and would not accept things without question.

Some of us have come into contact with some disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and have from them reliably known much about his life. And such faithful record of his spiritual struggle is of advantage to us. Ordinarily, genius is a person whose achievement is much greater than that of average people. Carlyle said, 'Genius is a capacity to take infinite pain.'⁵ Edison said, 'Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration.'⁶ In truth, by dint of hard labour one has a dazzling success and people call such a person a genius.

In the beginning these people did not know their greatness, but their potential came out because of hard work. Similarly, we find that even God-men had to struggle, but their great potential led them to success, which dazzled humanity for ages. A God-man is a mixture of human and divine qualities. Such a person is born as a human being, but does not have to grope in darkness the entire life. Such people struggle and find out what their true nature is. They are born with human imperfections for the good of humanity, so that we can see how even a human can turn divine. That is what Sri Ramakrishna did. We always find in him a mixture of the human and the divine, as though he was living in two worlds. Yet, he rose to such an overpowering height.

Even as a child, Sri Ramakrishna had super-normal experiences. When he was seven years old, while looking at the sky he saw a flock of white cranes flying against a background of dark clouds. As he looked at that sight, he went into a trance. That was his first experience of the superconscious state. It could be mistaken for a fainting fit, or in India, in a village of Bengal, for possession by a ghost.

On another occasion, when he was six or seven years old, some women of his neighbourhood took him along with them to a temple in a nearby village. On the way, they started singing devotional songs. It stirred the emotions of Sri Ramakrishna and he went into a superconscious state. The women were in a predicament as they had brought the child from another family and it was a great responsibility. However, soon Sri Ramakrishna came down to the normal plane and they took him to the temple.

When Sri Ramakrishna was nine years old, he was playing the part of Shiva in a country theatre. As soon as he started playing the character of Shiva, the god of renunciation and meditation, he went into a supreme state of bliss. People were amazed and the members of the theatre group were in difficulty, but after some hours he came down to the normal plane. Thus the hidden potential was manifested even while Sri Ramakrishna was very young.

Sri Ramakrishna was so gentle and lovable. He also had the power of discernment, the instinctive ability to find out what was right, and the capacity to put that into practice. Swami Vivekananda said of Sri Ramakrishna, 'I was so fortunate as to find one who was able to carry theory into practice.'⁷

To evolve spiritually, you need a keen intellect, power of discernment, and a strong mind. Most of us know what is right but cannot practise it. Two qualities must be combined: the instinct to find out what is right, to have far-sightedness; and to be able to put your ideas into practice. Sri Ramakrishna could do this from an early age. When his father died he was brought to Calcutta by his elder brother, who wanted to send him to a school. But, Sri Ramakrishna thought, 'What is the use of getting this bread-winning education that will give me wealth and not show me the meaning of life?' And he



Panchavati at Dakshineswar

refused to go to school. There was a keen power of discernment in his stand. How could such a young boy have such farsightedness to think of the deeper problems of life? He wanted to know the meaning of life, and he could see that book-learning would not give him that.

There was a Kali temple at that time at Dakshineswar, six miles from Calcutta, the city where every person getting Western education became a social renegade, a sceptic about Hinduism, and so on. Fortunately, as God willed it, Sri Ramakrishna became a priest in that temple, where there was a stone image of Kali, the Divine Mother. And Sri Ramakrishna worshipped with his keen, alert and rational mind, so much more highly developed than any of ours. He prayed and worshipped with devotion and emotion. His devotion was so great that even after the

hour of worship was over, he would sometimes be sitting there for a long time singing to the Divine Mother, songs of saints such as Ramprasad and Kamalakanta.

It may be difficult for some people to understand the utility of image worship. That thought came to Sri Ramakrishna, 'Is this simply a stone image, or a living reality? If it is simply a stone image, what is the use of worshipping it?' He had a great yearning for realizing God, and he was willing to pay any price. What is the price to be paid for realizing God? First, you must not have any pride—pride of your social position, caste, or anything else. Sri Ramakrishna had the sacred thread, which is worn about the shoulders by the Brahmins and people of some other castes in India. Sri Ramakrishna used to meditate in silence in a wood near the temple,

often at midnight. He would take off the sacred thread just to forget that he was in any way different from any other person. When his nephew saw this he thought that his uncle had gone mad and tried to stop Sri Ramakrishna from doing this, but failed.

The next step on the path of realization of God is that you must make no distinction between a piece of gold and a piece of earth or stone. Gita and other scriptures admonish this. Gold gives you wealth, position, social prestige, and strength in the outer world. Sri Ramakrishna was not willing to get wealth or power out of gold. He wanted to have faith completely in God, so he practised in this manner: In one hand he would take a lump of earth and in the other hand some coins, and he would throw both into the Ganga. He not only thought that they were equal, but he acted out his theory, so that the impression that gold was more valuable than a lump of earth, would be rooted out from his mind. He concluded that nothing mattered except God. This conviction got so deep that for the rest of his life, he could not touch any coin.

Narendranath, Swami Vivekananda's pre-monastic name, was very bold and tested everything before believing it. He put coins under Sri Ramakrishna's bed to test him. When Sri Ramakrishna went to bed, he began to scream, unable to bear the touch of the coins. Then, Narendranath took out the coins from under his bed. Practice had become instinctual in Sri Ramakrishna's life.

The next step is to practise humility. If you want to reach God, you must lay all bare in front of God, in all humility. So, Sri Ramakrishna would sometimes serve outcasts, who came to the temple. It was a social custom in India that if a person belonging to the higher classes went near an outcast, such person would have to take a bath to purify oneself. But though Sri Ramakrishna belonged to the highest caste,

the Brahmins, he would himself clean the eating places of the outcasts. He would do this secretly lest outcasts think that a great sin would accrue to them since a Brahmin had come to their place. Sri Ramakrishna practised these things to cultivate humility.

Sri Ramakrishna told the Divine Mother, 'If you are a living Mother and not a stone image, why should I not see you living?' And he was obsessed with this idea to such an extent that life became almost unbearable to him. When he reached that point, the Divine Mother revealed herself to him. He was in that state of ecstasy; he was altogether oblivious to his outer world. Afterwards, he said, 'What I saw was an infinite shoreless ocean of light; that ocean was consciousness. However far and in whatever direction I looked, I saw shining waves, one after another, coming towards me to swallow me up. They were madly rushing towards me from all sides, with a terrific noise. Very soon they were upon me, and they pushed me down into unknown depths. I panted and struggled and lost consciousness.' That was his first spiritual experience through conscious effort.

As soon as he got the taste of supreme bliss his yearning became more and more intense; he wanted to remain in that state always. He would sit on the banks of Ganga all day and cry aloud: 'Mother, another day has passed and still you have not appeared before me.' He could not stand the pang of separation from the divine Reality and he would sometimes rub his face on the ground.

Sri Ramakrishna passed through these stages before he was fulfilled, and then began his practice of other spiritual disciplines. He wanted to experience different paths of Hinduism to realize God. Hinduism is a conglomeration of different systems. There are sixty-four systems in the worship of the Divine Mother. Sri

Ramakrishna practised all these sixty-four systems and achieved success in each in no more than three days. For an ordinary person it would take at least three lives, if not three hundred. But he got the realization in three days in each system. It was extraordinary and was perhaps because his mind and heart were pure. Thereafter he practised other systems of Hinduism. He worshipped Krishna and Rama and got their visions.

Just imagine that in one lifetime, one could practise so many systems and become successful and reach the same truth. Afterwards he would say that if your longing is sincere and intense enough, help will come. Teachers came to him by themselves, whenever he needed them. The sixty-four systems of worship of the Divine Mother were taught by a woman saint. She came and upon seeing Sri Ramakrishna, at once understood that he not only had the potential to practise those systems, but possessed extraordinary spiritual powers as well. She was perhaps the first person who recognized that he was not an ordinary saint, but a God-man. She preached that, and naturally people laughed at her and were sceptical. She challenged them to bring in scholars who were well-versed in scriptures. A meeting was organized and she argued with scholars. And it was interesting that Sri Ramakrishna was sitting there like a child, looking at and hearing the arguments. She proved for the first time before an assembly of critics and scholars that Sri Ramakrishna had the same qualities that were manifested in the lives of Rama, Krishna, and other God-men.

Then there came a monk who practised non-dualism, the knowledge of the oneness of existence. Most religions are dualistic; we pray to God for something in return, however spiritual that prayer may be. But the ultimate Reality is oneness behind the many, say the Upanishads.

The monk, Totapuri, asked Sri Ramakrishna to learn non-dualism from him.

Totapuri taught Sri Ramakrishna the way of meditation to realize the ultimate Truth. Sri Ramakrishna had a bit of difficulty in concentrating in the beginning. Totapuri pricked between his eyebrows with a piece of glass and said, 'Meditate here.' At once he was in that supreme state of superconsciousness. Totapuri said, 'Is what I see really true? Is it possible that this great soul has realized in three days what I could accomplish only after forty years of strenuous sadhana?' After that for about six months Sri Ramakrishna was constantly in that non-dual state.

He was not satisfied even with that. He wanted to know how people of other religions pray to the same God. Why did Sri Ramakrishna continue practising sadhana even after attaining the constant presence of the Divine Mother? He answered this question himself: 'One who lives near the sea sometimes has a desire to find out how many pearls are hidden in the ocean depths. Similarly, after realizing the Divine Mother and being constantly near her, I thought that I should see her multiple forms. If I had a desire to see her in a particular way, I would importune her with a longing heart. Then the gracious Mother would supply whatever was necessary to experience that form, make me practise that sadhana, and reveal herself to me accordingly. Thus, I practised sadhanas belonging to various paths.'

It was not his sore need, but it was a joy to him to know how people of other religions realize God. Eventually he also saw Christ. He practised Islam and had the vision of Muhammad. It is the most important spiritual accomplishment in the history of the world: a person found through direct experience that all religions are true. Whoever says, 'My religion is true, all others are false,' is in great ignorance. Here is an authoritative proof that all religions are true.



The place of Sri Ramakrishna's Vedanta sadhana at Dakshineswar

What is the lesson Sri Ramakrishna got out of his spiritual practices? The greatest lesson is that the spiritual ideal can be realized in this life. He accomplished it in a short span, while we may not. We may have to strive longer, but that does not matter. It is a source of great strength to all of us to know that the spiritual ideal can be realized. He proved it in recent times. We hear of saints and sages who lived in ancient times. We do not know how many of the facts of their lives are true and how many are just interpolations, exaggerated views of devotees and disciples. But now in the present sceptical age, here is the proof that God can be realized.

Ordinarily, we do not realize the significance of Sri Ramakrishna's realizations. But when we know how bewildered the world is, how all of us are in darkness and conflict, not knowing the solution to this conflict, we see that he brought in a ray of light. It does not matter whether he was a Christian or a Hindu. We need not see his life from that standpoint. From the standpoint of this world, we see here a person, a human being, who can bring the blazing light of spirituality into this life. That points to the goal of humanity, to why we are groping in darkness. It shows us the way out.

God is not a distant reality, sitting above




Gazitala, the place of Sri Ramakrishna's Sufi sadhana

the clouds to punish us, to take note of our frailties, wickedness, and evil acts. God is loving and eager to come to us. God and human beings are calling one another. To Sri Ramakrishna, the Divine Mother was much more affectionate and loving than the earthly mother. It makes our task easier if we know that we do not have to struggle so hard, if we go with the idea that God is a loving reality, not simply a God of justice and punishment. Sri Ramakrishna pointed out that God is the embodiment of love.

Sri Ramakrishna told his disciples that they need not struggle as hard as he did and it was sufficient if they did one-sixteenth part of what he did. It was necessary for them to do one-sixteenth part of what their Master did because they were to be the bearers of his message. But the message of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna was that it will be much easier for us of the later

generations. Sri Ramakrishna approached the riverbed of religion, which was silted, and he took out the silt, and water started flowing making it easier for us to drink water. Pioneers have to undergo great trials, tribulations, and labours, which are not necessary for those who follow them. They chalk out the road for us; we have to simply follow that. That is the significance of the life of a God-man. They come to this earth to give a spiritual impetus to humanity when people forget high spiritual ideals, and even think they cannot put those ideas into practice. Sri Ramakrishna gave that impetus.

He is both the goal and the way. He is the ideal and the method. The most important result of his spiritual practice is that he gives us

courage, strength, and raises in us hope that we can go that way and at last quench our spiritual thirst. Our spiritual thirst is not so great as that of Sri Ramakrishna, but all of us can quench it. That is the importance of the spiritual struggle he underwent for the sake of humanity. 

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Tantra and the Sri Vidya

Pradeep Kumar Pandey

EVERY LIVING BEING is subject to existential miseries. Humankind has devised many means and methods to be free from these miseries. Through the ages Indians have evolved various sadhanas to overcome existential miseries and one of them is the Sri Vidya. The threefold miseries are *adhibhautika*, caused by terrestrial beings and things; *adhidaivika*, caused by natural calamities; and *adhyatmika*, arising from bodily and mental causes. By practising a variety of sadhanas one is not only able to fulfil one's worldly desires and obtain happiness but also to become completely free from sorrows and attain the state of *mukti*, freedom.

Sadhana

The word 'sadhana' has a vast and deep meaning. Every work, activity, or objective has its particular means or methods to accomplish it. Sadhana is a discipline undertaken in the pursuit of a goal. According to the scriptures, spiritual sadhana prevents an excess of worldliness and moulds the mind and one's *bhava*, disposition, which in turn develops knowledge. According to some teachers, *abhyasa*, repeated practice, is the hallmark of a sadhaka's life. Every sadhana demands a high level of activity for a long period of time. In the world of spirituality a sadhaka, through sadhana, goes beyond the threefold miseries and attains pure *ananda*, joy.

There is an ocean of difference between the spiritual and materialistic views of achieving joy. Living beings do not simply nurture the desire for happiness, but also strive endlessly to fulfil it. Happiness attained by various means is

impermanent and does not last long. Our joy on obtaining some desired object turns into sorrow on losing it. Now the question arises: how does one achieve everlasting happiness? When achievements increase, so do our expectations or hopes, which ultimately leads to sorrow. Ancient Indian thinkers came up with the solution: '*Asha hi paramam duhkham nairashyam paramam sukham*'; the greatest misery comes from hoping and the greatest happiness lies in giving up hope.¹ The meaning is clear: one must be able to renounce hope but work hard towards attaining things.

What is hope? It is just a mental wave on the restless ocean of the mind. Therefore, the mind has to be controlled, as taught in the Bhagavad-gita: '*abhyasena tu kaunteya vairagyena cha grihyate*'; [the mind] is controlled through practice and detachment.² By vigilant practice and detachment the mind is brought under control. This practice, in general, and the various means adopted like tantras, mantras, and *yantras*, in particular, are the subject matter of this article. In this age Sri Ramakrishna says that Shakti mantras are very efficacious. Tantra, mantra, and *yantra*, believed to be revealed by Shiva himself, though apparently different, are in essence one and the same. Mantra is that mystical formula by which the inherent power of a person is awakened and reinforced; *yantra* is its mystic pictorial form, and tantra is the practical form.

Tantra

According to the ancient spiritual traditions, the process by which the various types and categories

of knowledge are elaborated and propagated is called tantra. Put simply, the mode of practice that eliminates the threefold miseries is tantra. Interestingly, it is a religious practice that transcends even the boundaries of religion—as it is also found in other religions like Buddhism—what to speak of country.

Tantra is also known as Agama, the tradition that came down from Lord Shiva through the Divine Mother Paramba, or Parvati, to Nandi and the Bhairavas, the companions of Shiva. According to some other traditions, tantra is a practice through the five different methods—*patala*, *pad-dhati*, *kavacha*, *sahasranama*, and *stotra*. According to the *Varahi Tantra*, creation, dissolution, worship of gods, all the practices and rituals regarding peace, attraction, obstruction, killing, and meditation are included in tantra. We can take the analogy of a car as a *yantra*, machine, with the knowledge of driving as mantra, operating skill, and the engineering and technology of the vehicle as tantra. It is not possible to drive the machine to the desired destination without its technology, which provides the operative knowledge. To avoid failure as well as accidental disasters, one has to be mindful of even the minor operative mistakes or inadvertence, which makes the knowledge of the tantra indispensable. For reach-

ing any desired goal, we need to work out the exact path, the complete methodology, various modes or approaches, the actual process of reaching there—all these come under the expanse of tantra like Rajatantra, Ganatantra.

The Atharva Veda contains mainly the description of mantras, black magic, and other esoteric practices. These elaborate descriptions were not just mummary and superstitions but were founded on the basis of realizations attained after repeatedly practising certain spiritual disciplines, meticulously documenting them. Tantra literature is broadly classified into three main categories: Shaiva, Shakta, and Vaishnava. The Ganapatya school of tantra is also included in these. According to the sacred tradition of the tantras, there are many further types and subtypes of these main schools. Grossly they can be classified again into two distinct types: Dakshina and Vama.

Dakshinachara, right-handed practices, enumerates different sattvic disciplines undertaken by the aspirant including *sandhya-vandana*, Offering oblations to the sacred fire, living only on sattvic food like milk, and other austerities.

Left-handed practices are exactly opposite to Dakshinachara. In Vamachara practice one needs to wear a garland of the teeth of a

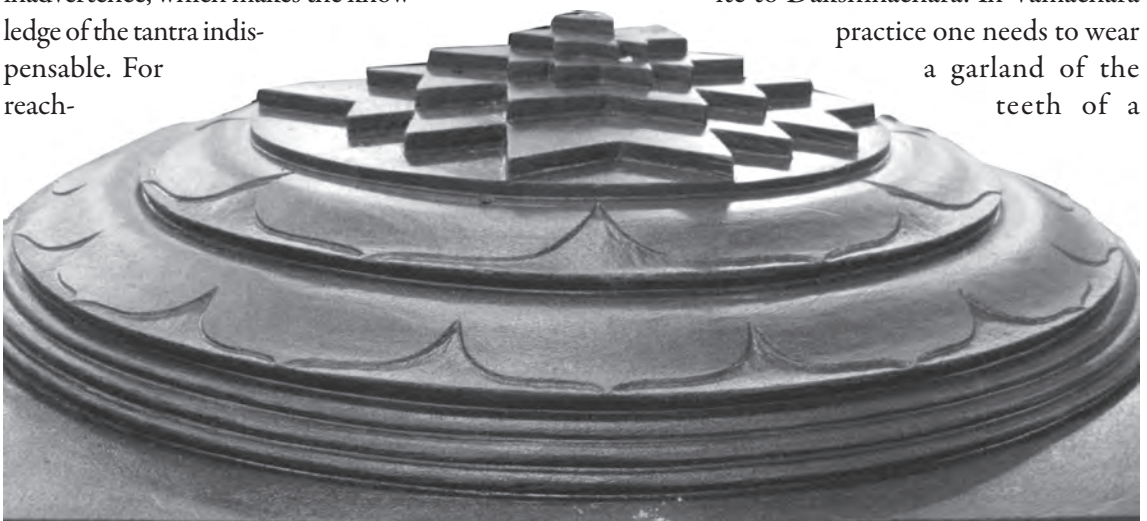


PHOTO: SRI CHAKRA INSTALLED IN A TEMPLE OF DIVINE MOTHER / RASHKESH

dead person, eat stale food, follow *pancha-makaras*, and so on. *Pancha-makaras*, the five essentials of the left-hand tantra ritual—each one of which begins with the letter ‘ma’. They are, *madya*, wine; *mamsa*, meat; *matsya*, fish; *mudra*, cereal fries; and *maithuna*, ritual sexual intercourse. Though there are subtle scientific laws governing such apparently mysterious spiritual practices, very few aspirants are eligible to perform them in full. Many incompetent sadhakas have corrupted the Vamachara discipline, which led to a wrong understanding of tantra in society. They have resorted to dubious practices in the name of tantra.

Essentially, tantra is a spiritual discipline, in which the superimpositions of the differences of name, form, and action on the Divine Mother and the cosmic power, are removed to experience the undivided great primordial power of truth.

The Sri Vidya

As discussed earlier, the traditional doctrines or precepts of the tantras, mantras, and *yantras* had been originally narrated by Shiva to the Divine Mother Parvati in sixty-four different forms which can either take one to liberation or fulfil the worldly desires of the aspirant. It was due to the Divine Mother’s compassion on the seekers, who were incompetent to take those precepts in their original form, that Shiva created a path suitable for seekers still attached to physical enjoyments. Thus the sixty-fifth tantra was born in the form of the Sri Vidya, with its presiding deity as Mother Lalita, also known as Tripura or Shodashi. We can go back to the Vedas to find the seeds of the Sri Vidya in concise aphorisms, but the tantras have presented this life-giving science through an elaborate practical technique called the Sri Vidya. Sri Krishna explains the Sri Vidya in the Gita: ‘*Rajavidya rajaguhyam*

Sri Chakra Worship



pavitram-idam-uttamam, pratyakshavagamam dharmyam susukham kartumavyayam; it is the sovereign science, the sovereign mystery, and the supreme purifier. It is perceived by direct experience, it accords with dharma; it is easy to practise, and it is imperishable' (9.2). It is because this knowledge is pure, practical, and bestows direct spiritual experience that Sri Krishna calls it the kingly science.

In recent times people were led to believe that the Sri Vidya and the Sri Yantra are one and the same, and that the Sri Yantra is for the propitiation of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. Though in this age of wealth and prosperity it is natural to have such notions, they have neither scriptural authority nor the authority of tradition. The Sri Vidya is auspicious and therefore also referred to as Brahma Vidya. The spiritual practices described in the Sri Vidya are based on Shakta doctrines, which believe that the entire creation is the manifestation of the primordial power. This is power venerated and worshipped as the Divine Mother from oldest spiritual traditions of India.

Acharya Shankara says, '*Shiva shaktya yukto yadi bhavati shaktah prabhavitum na chedevam devo na khalu kushalah spanditum api*; if Shiva is united with Shakti, he is able to exert his powers as lord; if not, the god is unable to move.'³ The same divine power is called here Lalita. She is worshipped on three planes of existence—gross, subtle, and causal. Here the gross plane is represented by the Sri Yantra, which is also referred to as the Sri Chakra, the body of Shiva, and it is believed to be the originating point of this creation.

The Worship of the Sri Yantra

The presiding deity of the Sri Yantra or the Sri Vidya is Lalita, or Tripurasundari. Her story is found in the *Brahmananda Purana*. The

worship of the Sri Vidya includes the practice of several mantras, broadly classified as *Mula Vidya* and *Anga Vidya*. *Mula* Vidyas are mainly four: Gayatri, Bala, Panchadashi, and Shodashi. The *Anga* Vidyas are further classified into six amnyas: Purva-amnaya, Dakshina-amnaya, Paschima-amnaya, Uttara-amnaya, Urdhva-amnaya, and Anuttara-amnaya. There are fifteen deities who preside over the days between a full moon and a new moon. These are the general features of the Sri Vidya worship.

While observing the Sri Yantra closely we find many different geometrical representations with triangles, octagons, eight-petalled lotuses, sixteen-petalled lotuses, and so on, all of which have their own cryptic meanings and important significance. This makes it necessary for an aspirant of the Sri Vidya to seek the guidance of an experienced preceptor or guru and perform the worship following strictly his or her instructions. Otherwise one will surely yield nothing but miserable results, as told in the Gita: '*Yah shastravidhim utsrijya vartate kamakaratah, na sa siddhim avapnoti na sukham na param gatim*'; he who discards the injunctions of the scriptures and acts upon the impulse of desire attains neither perfection nor happiness nor the Supreme Goal.'⁴

In sum, to practise the tantra tradition of the Sri Vidya one must have earned great merit from past births and also have won the grace of a perfect guru. Only after meeting these prerequisites and performing the sadhana scrupulously can the seeker realize and attain the supreme goal of life in the form of fulfilment of desires and freedom from all bondage.



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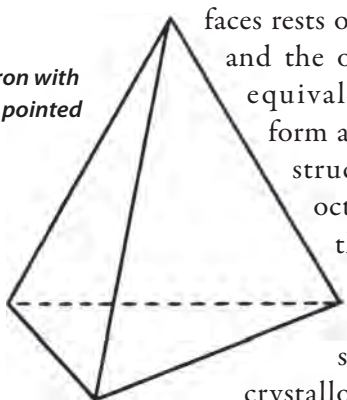
The Sri Chakra: A Blend of Science and Mythology

G Siva Reddy

THE SRI CHAKRA, OR THE SRI YANTRA, in various modified forms, is being worshipped by people of different faiths throughout the world. The basic structure of the Sri Chakra, in the two dimensional form, is the union of two equilateral triangles—one with its vertex pointed upwards and the other with its vertex pointed downwards. Each triangle in the two-dimensional form of the Sri Chakra represents a trigonal pyramid in three-dimensional form. The trigonal pyramid is called a tetrahedron. In the three-dimensional form the basic unit is represented as the union of two tetrahedra. The same form is also known in physical sciences and geology as the formation of an octahedron, by inverting one tetrahedron over the other and rotating one of them by sixty degrees relative to the other.

The Tetrahedron—trigonal pyramid—is the first of the five Platonic solids. It consists of four equilateral triangles, and if the tetrahedron is placed on a table, one of the triangular

*Tetrahedron with
its vertex pointed
above*



faces rests on the table and the other three equivalent faces form a pyramidal structure. The octahedron is the second one of the Platonic solids. In crystallography, in

the formation of an octahedron by the fusion of two tetrahedra, one tetrahedron has its vertex pointed upwards and the other pointed downwards, as described above.



Octahedron

There are thousands of complex structures in nature built up of tetrahedra and octahedra by sharing the corners. More than ninety-five per cent of the mass of earth—including the water, ice, and air surrounding the globe—have structures related to tetrahedra and octahedra. For example, *sphatika*, quartz, having the chemical formula SiO_2 , has tetrahedra joined together in all the three dimensions resulting finally in a hexagonal outer form. Similarly the structure of water (H_2O) can be described as containing eight valency electrons, one pair at each corner of the tetrahedron. Thus the union shown above symbolically represents the whole of nature. Since the structures are very complex, when several tetrahedra are joined by corners in three dimensions, the tetrahedron is represented by an equilateral triangle for the sake of understanding in chemistry and other sciences. Further, it may be noted that an octahedron contains the centre of symmetry—coinciding with the point—whereas tetrahedron does not contain the centre of symmetry. An octahedron contains six corners, four are in equatorial plane and two are apical ones. The figure given here shows how the

union of two triangles results in the formation of an octahedron.

In Indian mythology, the triangle with the vertex pointed upwards is considered as Shiva—male—and the triangle with the vertex pointed downwards is known as Shivani—female. For sustenance also, we depend on nature. Thus the union symbolically refers to both creation and sustenance. Dissolution always follows creation, because if any new species are to be evolved, the earlier ones need to be dissolved. Consequently, while worshipping Shiva in the form of a lingam, together with *panavattam*, the base of the lingam, we are actually worshipping the entire universe with its creation, sustenance, and dissolution. Swami Vivekananda says that it refers to the completion of one cycle. According to Swamiji, the word ‘creation’ in English is inappropriate, since nothing can be created out of nothing. He suggests the use of the word ‘projection’ as more appropriate.¹

The tantric symbol of the union of two triangles represents the worship of Shiva and Shivani. By convention Shiva should not be worshipped without Parvati, and Parvati should not be worshipped without Shiva. It is customary that Shiva should not be worshipped in human form. In a particular representation of Sri Lalita, she sits on the lap of Lord Shiva, as described by Acharya Shankara: ‘*Shiva-kare manche paramashiva paryanka nilayam*, [your] abode, the [triangular] bed of Paramashiva, laid on the platform of the form of Shiva.’²

The prevalent images of Sri Lalita show one of her feet touching the Sri Chakra with the other foot folded up. Shiva is also known as Ardhanarishvara and Bhutanath, king of *panchabhutas*, the five elements. The Sri Vidya mantra containing the three *kutas*, groups, also refer to the above cycle. Therefore, whatever

we worship, be it the lingam and *panavattam*, the tantric symbol of the union of two triangles, the Sri Vidya keeping her foot on the Sri Chakra, or the Sri Chakra itself, uttering the fifteen-lettered mantra, the worship always refers to the entire nature or the entire cosmos, projection, sustenance, and dissolution, followed by the next cycle.


Zoroastrians also worship this octahedral symbol. The national flag of Israel has this symbol, which represents the Star of David. This symbol was also worshipped in Pre-Abrahamic times. Polytheistic faiths, both in America and Europe, also worship this symbol. In Christian, Zoroastrian, or polytheistic mythologies the triangle with its vertex upwards is known as the Chalice and with its vertex downwards is known as the Cup. The union of the Cup and the Chalice is known as the Star of David, which was Solomon’s seal. Mormons still worship this symbol, which is depicted in the Mormon Church, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA. In it there are two concentric circles circumscribing the union of two triangles instead of three as in the Sri Chakra. Further one notices a total number of fourteen triangles and three pyramids in each of the outer triangles. Thus the total number of triangles is fifty instead of forty-three or forty-four as in the Sri Chakra. Of course, there are certain basic differences in the diagram too. The basic unit has a point-like structure.

The logo of Aurobindo Ashrama has the fusion of two triangles as explained earlier. In addition to this, a lotus is found at the position of the point. Further, an additional square is placed in the centre. The two-dimensional square may represent a cube in a three-dimensional pattern; the octahedron belongs to cubic symmetry. There are sixteen triangles in the logo.

Sri Aurobindo studied the Vedas and the

Upanishads and wrote several commentaries on them, apart from his popular books like *Savitri* and *The Life Divine*. The logo has been explained thus: ‘The descending triangle represents Sat-Chit-Ananda. The ascending triangle represents the aspiring answer from matter under the form of life, light and love. The junction of both—the central square—is the perfect manifestation having at its centre the Avatar of the Supreme—the lotus. The water—inside the square—represents the multiplicity, the creation.’³

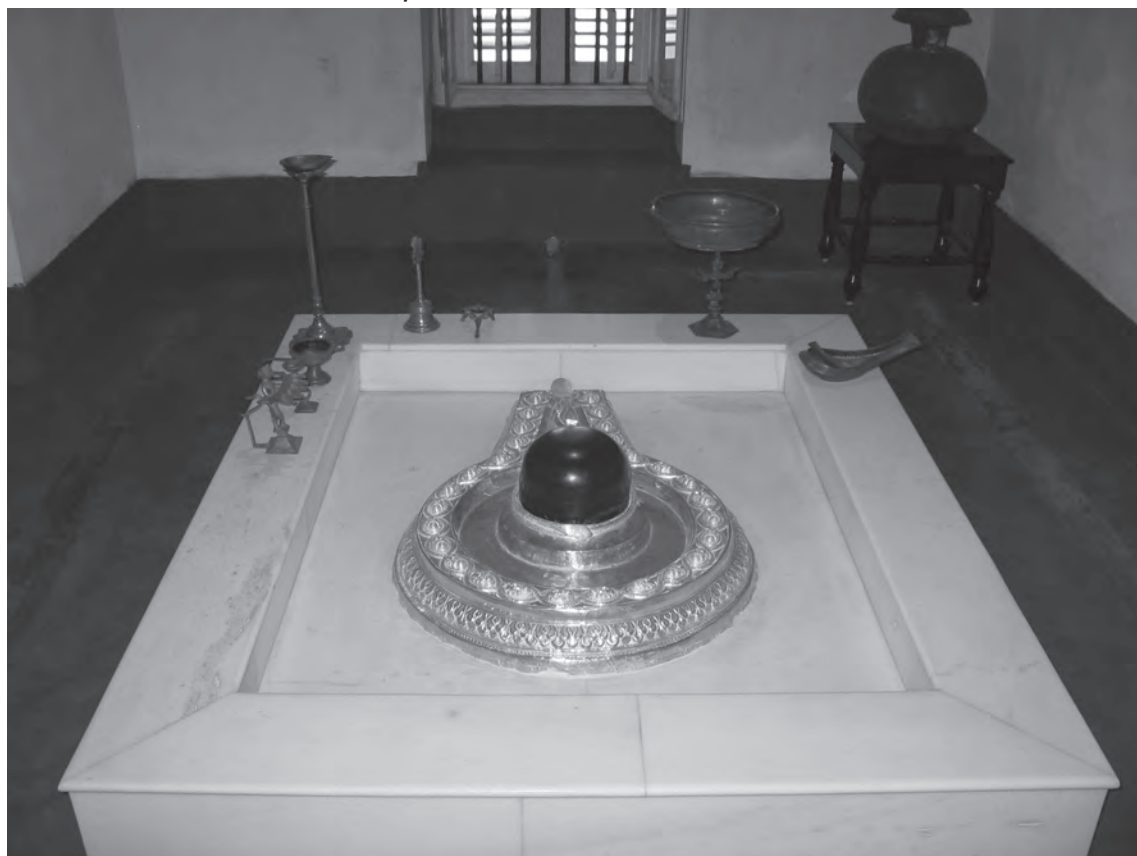
Acharya Shankara ascribes the roles of projection, sustenance, and dissolution to the Sri Vidya in the very first verse of *Saundarya Lahari*. He says that Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva are fortunate to

worship the Sri Vidya to carry out their assigned duties. In the very next verse, Acharya Shankara reiterates that the holy dust of the Sri Vidya’s feet is responsible for the proper discharge of duties by Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Thus the worship of the basic unit of the Sri Chakra, the tantric symbol discussed here, represents projection, sustenance, and dissolution, and helps us realize the Divine Mother. 

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Vireshwara Shiva Temple at Swami Vivekananda’s Ancestral House in Kolkata



The Sands of Performance

Carolyn Roark

THE TIBETAN SAND MANDALA is a beautiful thing, astonishing in its complexity and colour, remarkable both for the effort that goes into its construction and the readiness of its makers to destroy it upon completion. Something between painting and sculpture, the process involves the careful arrangement of coloured grains of sand into piles and patterns, forming a large canvas like an elaborate map with raised topographical features. It is part of a larger tradition in Buddhist ritual arts, which include dance, sculpture, music, chanting, and painting. In addition to a particular mandala—made of coloured particles such as flowers, rice, powder, or sand—the patterns may either be painted, drawn, or sculpted in three dimensions with materials like wood, metal, and stone. They may also be mentally envisioned through meditation. Scholarly analysis on mandala building practices, along with other forms of Buddhist art, especially performance, is a relatively young discipline outside of anthropological circles. While scholars and artists writing on Buddhist ritual arts do not ignore the fact that the building process is central to various visual media, they have not fully investigated the inherent theatricality of many, especially mandalas.¹

Buddhist Mandala Building as Cultural Offering

Scholars and art critics alike continue to address sand mandalas as a visual art. Even John Bryant—the founder of the Samaya Foundation—does so, as the title of his book on the topic, *The Wheel of Time Sand Mandala: Visual*

Scripture of Tibetan Buddhism, clearly demonstrates. This text offers a thorough discussion of the place of the mandalas in tantric doctrine and does valuable work by placing them in the broader context of Tibetan Buddhist ritual arts. Labelling them ‘visual scripture’ does not ignore the processual nature of the creative act in question—it is difficult to forget that shortly after completion, sand mandalas are dismantled and disbursed to symbolize the reunion with the cosmic whole. Nevertheless, it does minimize the performative dimension of the construction, which is central to the identity of the form. The live, performed quality of the building and dissolution ceremony associated with a mandala includes a number of meditative gestures inherent to the devotional nature of the process. My analysis here is an effort to draw the practice of sand mandala making into the realm of performance studies, and to situate publicly created mandalas as para-theatrical events in which sacred and secular spaces meet.² The events I address, which occur in secular spaces throughout the west, frame the work as ‘cultural offering’—a phrase coined by Bryant—which extract the ritual from its original sacred context in order to foster intercultural community-building and consciousness-raising, while retaining the essential function of the mandalas in Buddhist prayer. As Tibetan Buddhist religious communities have become increasingly politically active and engaged with the global public sphere, ritual arts like mandala building have become important tools for peace-building and political consciousness-raising.



Chenrezig sand mandala created at the House of Commons in the United Kingdom

Private, Public, and Performative Character

The mandala concept is complex and, at first glance, seemingly incompatible with the public venues that have hosted building events in the West. *The Buddhist Handbook* describes it thus:

This is a *temenos*, a sacred space. It is also a model of both the cosmos and of the total human being, for there is an equivalence between the two: they are macrocosm and microcosm. ... Formally *mandala* thus consist of series of concentric precincts converging on a focal sanctum or palace, guarded by dreaded guards, where the presiding *yidam* or some other potent symbol of ultimate reality resides. In a sense, therefore, *mandala* are maps of the spiritual journey itself, and contemplation of them assists in the accomplishment of that journey by awakening latent spiritual potentials buried deep in the subconscious of the practitioner.³

The Tibetan equivalent term, *kyilkhor*, also refers to a multiplicity of manifestations of the form and translates as ‘center and surrounding environment’.⁴ David E R George refers to them as ‘maps of its [the Vajrayana] meditative universe at the centre of which is the Adi-Buddha, the primordial, universal and infinite Buddhahood latent in all beings’.⁵ The practice creates sacred spaces, both physical and metaphysical, and tradition holds that they belong in private, consecrated territory.

To serve their function, the mandalas would seem to require devotional surroundings. The images presented most often depict the palace of a given deity, which itself represents something more abstract, the state of being that the deity inhabits and embodies. Each serves as a focusing device to create the heightened awareness that is

central to Buddhist faith. Through visualization and meditative study of the image, students of the tantra may seek to 'enter' the mandala and ground themselves in that same state of being. This work requires intense concentration and full immersion in the devotional praxis. How can the sacred character of a space endure when the practitioner must share it with a milling crowd of uninitiated observers who have no connection with their beliefs or culture?

Indeed, as an art form aimed primarily at efficacy, sand mandala making has long been a practice to which only members of the Buddhist faith community had access. Often part of a larger series of ceremonies intended to initiate students to a given tantra, the construction process focuses the practitioner on meditative interaction with the mandalas as a means of developing *bodhichitta*, the selfless compassion needed to help others achieve enlightenment. For example, the Kalachakra, 'Wheel of Time' sand mandala, is part of the larger Kalachakra initiation. Nine days of ritual activities comprise the initiation. In the first seven, monks prepare the space for the students' arrival, including the construction of a Kalachakra sand mandala. Initiates participate in the final two days, during which they perform rituals of repentance and commitment and receive instruction from a master. During this time they observe the mandala, meditate before it, and participate in its dissolution ceremony. The mandalas offer to anyone gazing upon them the opportunity to contemplate on their own Buddha nature. With the mandalas, to gaze is to participate, for the object invites interactive imagining and serves as a pathway or vehicle to attaining that ultimate state of being. Robert A F Thurman stresses that the act of gazing upon the mandala constitutes a vital step in the initiation process: 'Tibetans thus believe that

anyone who looks on the color-particle Mandala of the Kalachakra Buddha with reverence and faith will be reborn advantageously during the era of Shambhala. That is why they undertake arduous pilgrimages and make intense efforts to attend performances of the Kalachakra initiation ritual.'⁶ This particular mandala is a symbolic pathway along which the soul may travel towards that ultimate destination, making it an invaluable spiritual tool.

The key to the successful transition of mandala building from sacred to secular space is in the performativity already woven into its ritual purpose: the image serves as a route along which the practitioner mentally travels to increase discipline and awareness, the conscious mind often aided by constructing a physical map of the psychic territory in question. The object is, as Bryant says, a manifestation of scripture, a visual text. But in creating it, the monk performs. He chants, he breathes, he gestures, and he labours at a series of physical tasks. He envisions himself undertaking the journey mapped by the image. Where observers are gathered to watch the process and meditate upon that image, they too are invited to undertake a pilgrimage of self-awareness, with the mandala as a guide. If the construction occurs in public, they serve as witnesses to that process. And it is in the painstaking process of making the object, the mindful adherence to ritual at every step of laying out diagrams and placing the sand granules, the conscious belief in observing and being observed —by oneself through mindfulness, by the deity or divine aspect to whom it is dedicated, by others who are present—that the significance and efficacy of the practice lies.

Tibetan Buddhist ritual arts are grounded in a theology that stresses the real possibility of radical personal transformation and a powerful belief that enlightened beings are constantly at work in the world, attempting to open doors for the rest of

us. Robert Thurman describes Tibetan culture as defined by this experience of real Buddhas dwelling among them. It is thus a civilization that feels itself touched by Buddhas, marked by having experienced the living impact of real Buddhas. Tibetans have even come to take for granted the constant presence of many Buddhas around the country. Tibetan Buddhism is thus a reorientation of individual and social life to account for the reality of Buddhas, the possibility of becoming one oneself, and the actuality of a methodical process for doing so (2).

According to this doctrine, ordinary humans exist in a state of constant desire—persistent and eternally deferred even as the wish of a given moment is obtained—combined with a seductive but false belief that we exist independently of and in isolation from the universe at large. Buddhas have divested themselves of both desire and the illusion of the discrete self, but remain among humanity to guide others to the same path. In a prophesied golden age students of the dharma will help bring an end to violence of all kinds and kindle a great spiritual transformation among humans. Individuals who seek refuge in the dharma commit themselves to the intentional cultivation of selfless awareness and motivation to benefit other conscious beings. They undertake daily practices of mental and physical discipline to cultivate detachment and goodwill. The ritual arts serve that purpose. The builders of publicly constructed mandalas intend that their events should do so as well, that their actions should reap positive benefits for the community of observers of their work and impart peaceable enlightenment to the world at large.

Mandala Events in the West

As a form of meditative training, the mandalas offer pictographic presentations of certain beneficial states of being. Bryant states that ‘they not

only provide another dimension of the teachings but also the opportunity to develop devotion through their practice.’⁷ Traditionally, their primary goal has been to enhance the spiritual discipline or experience of the practitioner. Dancing, sculpting, drawing, meditating—whatever the medium, the act for the practitioner is a prayer practice intended to draw him or her out of bad habits of mind or body and into a place of conscious release and awareness. George indicates that mandala building was an important early phase in the *Mani Rimdu* celebrations of Tibet and Nepal, a ritual he describes as ‘an act of compassion motivated by the *bodhisattva* ideal which will cleanse the whole area of evil for the next twelve months.’⁸ Bryant indicates that all ritual arts ‘[w]hen properly made and consecrated ... are believed to contain the same empowering energy as the text, the deity, or even the Buddha himself. They are considered to embody that which they represent.’⁹ Ritual arts have, therefore, special significance as a practical means to the ultimate end of the dedicated Buddhist—detachment from the illusion of self as well as the trap of personal desire and the subsequent attainment of enlightenment. Through them the practitioners can hope to effect genuine change in themselves and in the world.

This is the philosophy that guides communities of Tibetan Buddhist monks, who bring ritual arts practices into Western settings, often including in their activities the construction of a mandala. Indeed, the very first of these visits concentrated specifically on sand mandala construction and were framed as ‘cultural demonstrations.’ The Samaya Foundation sponsored two inaugural events in 1988, first at their building in New York and another a short time later at the American Museum of Natural History. These initial demonstrations paved the way for further interactions between Himalayan monastic communities and arts and cultural organizations in



*Buddhist monks making
a sand mandala*

the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere. These began as occasional invitations to perform in specific cultural venues. Increased interest through the 1990s eventually led to monastic groups making themselves available for tours, with a repertory of ritual performances that can be requested as part of a residency. The Gaden Jangtse Monastery, Mungdod, Karnataka, India, for example, houses the Tsawa Monks and their ongoing 'World Peace Cultural Tour'.¹⁰ Each visiting group of monks has its own character, as have the residencies and ritual performances that have occurred since the initial Samaya sponsored events. But the articulated goal of the events, as a category of performance or 'cultural demonstration', has remained remarkably consistent, in tune with the doctrine that guides the monks in their work. As articulated in the Tsawa group's statement of purpose: 'We seek to promote harmony and peace amongst all people and within each person, and to encourage the cultivation of compassion and kindness towards all living beings through the sharing with others of our [sic] ancient and vibrant Tibetan Buddhist traditions' (ibid.). These intentions always undergird the

stated purpose of the rituals presented, including the mandalas.

While the specifics of any single mandala building event can vary,¹¹ its ritual nature requires that a number of codified behaviours be observed. The whole ceremony constitutes a ritual performance. First, the space and tools must be consecrated through chanting and musical accompaniment. Then the basic grid of the design is laid out on a flat surface by drawing lines with ruler and pencil or chalk-impregnated string. It is divided into quadrants—north, south, east, and west—and then the lines associated with the layout of the deity's palace. The detail work is filled in from memory using this grid as a guide. When the layout is done, the monks, usually four in number, take up their coloured powders and long thin metal funnels called *chakpu* and execute the complicated patterns of figures, words, symbols, and decorative flourishes by slowly pouring small amounts of sand down the funnels. They control the flow of sand by tapping and stroking the *chakpu* with a small metal wand. It is a slow, painstaking process, and the monks work with their faces hovering inches above the developing

image, carefully controlling their breath and posture so as not to disturb the delicately arranged particles.¹² On completion, the work might be permitted to stand for a short time—often the case in public Western settings as sponsors typically prefer a large number of visitors to see it—but after a brief interval the builders sweep the sand into a pile at the centre of the grid, erasing in moments what has taken hours or days to build. They then pour the resulting dust heap into a sacred receptacle and with music and chanting carry it in procession to a nearby water source, where the sand is poured in. From start to finish the practice utilizes performative gesture; when an audience of secular outsiders enters the equation, the process shifts from performative to overtly theatrical.

Analysing the Event

As stated in the introduction to this essay, there exists little inquiry into the embodied, performative nature of sand mandalas, as well as other more plastic medium such as sculpture and painting. In the early days of Western mandala events, art critics were the most inclined to recognize the connection between the mandala making and theatre performance. For example, following the 1988 Natural History event, *Village Voice* critic John Perrault called the demonstration ‘performance art of a high order.’¹³ In *Buddhism as/in Performance* George also suggests that Buddhism and performance art are mutually illuminating. He argues that, like meditation and other rituals, ‘if Performance Art does anything it refocuses the attention on the artist and the process rather than the artwork, exploding the falsely static quality of the “product”.’¹⁴ The work of creating and destroying a sand mandala accomplishes this as well. As the meditative process encourages a close awareness of self—with the ultimate goal of recognizing and releasing attachment—it produces a kind of phenomenological attitude in the performer and the

observer. That said, while sand mandala making is a species of performance, it is not performance art. While both practices share an emphasis on the process of the making and not on the completed object, the devotional discipline seeks not to foreground the performer—as personality, discrete self, or subject—but rather to allow both the performer and the spectator to be absorbed into the deeper spiritual function of the event. The goal is not the explication of self, it is rather the disappearance of self. While Buddhist ritual arts ought not to be considered performance art *per se*, they do share the sense that the process is key to the deep metaphysical understanding pursued or explored by the performer.

Martin J Boord, an Oxford-trained scholar and Buddhist practitioner, offers a more accurate description of the theatrical character of the process, especially with regard to consecrating the chosen site: ‘Accompanying these generation stage meditations are a number of elaborate and demanding rituals that dramatize the meditations with arcane theatre.’¹⁵

There are many mandalas, with specific spiritual benefit associated with meditatively building or gazing upon each. However, all demand the same commitment on the part of the individual: a selfless, pure motivation to benefit others. Boord puts it thus: ‘As each tiny speck of coloured powder alights upon the consecrated ground, the yogin must have the firm conviction that another Buddha has descended from the sky in order to become manifest in the very fabric of the drawn *mandala*. In this way the entire structure is made of Buddhas and has enlightenment as its very essence’ (83). With that in mind, all the mandalas are intended for the spiritual seeker and student of the dharma, not the casual spectator, ethnographer, or art lover. Yet the earliest of the Western sand mandala events; which were sponsored by the Samaya Foundation; contextualize

them as cultural demonstrations of an art form intended for a general public uninitiated in the tantra and, moreover, ignorant of the spiritual implications of the ceremonies involved. At first this seems to be at odds with the devotional nature of Buddhist ritual art. But the changing relationship of Tibetan Buddhism with the global community helps illuminate the shift from sacred to civic space in contemporary, Western demonstrations of sand mandala making, which Bryant styles as ‘cultural offering[s].’¹⁶

The present situation of Tibet has brought Tibetan Buddhism, and especially the monastic communities of Tibet, Mongolia, and Nepal, into much more frequent contact with the rest of the world. Indeed the Dalai Lama himself has long been an internationally recognized advocate of peace and pacifism, a popular author and public speaker on both religious and diplomatic subjects. In his travels, the Dalai Lama often aims to raise awareness of the situation of his homeland, having committed himself to being a voice for his people to the international community.¹⁷ Tibetan monks often participate in public events organized by their supporters in other countries—speaking, chanting, dancing—where exhibitions of ritual art forms double as a means of raising money for their monastic communities in the whole world. One translator for a university campus visit by monks, which included a mandala building and musical performance, phrased it most succinctly: ‘They travel to bring their spirituality to the world.’¹⁸

Mandala events taking place in secular spaces—especially those staged at Western sites throughout North America, the UK, and elsewhere—can be read as part of a socially aware theology; moreover they demonstrate that for the monks, devotional praxis can also be social praxis. That is to say, the prayerful, meditative work of building the mandala serves not only to advance the spiritual

development of the mandala builders, but to generate positive spiritual benefit for the community witnessing the building; indeed, the benefit can extend to the whole world. Tibetan Buddhist theology holds that individual prayer and meditation can create favourable energy that extends beyond the practitioner’s immediate sphere. As with the prayer practices of other faith traditions, the subject of a prayer need not know of the intervention on their behalf in order for the practitioner to believe in its power. They do not have to consent to the prayers deployed, nor agree with its intended impact on their lives. In many cases, they will carry on in complete ignorance of the act, though the practitioner offering the prayer may view some change in the subjects’ circumstance as evidence of the prayer’s efficacy. This may encourage the subject at some point, to concentrate on the act of prayer as well. The key element in the interaction is the practitioner’s intention to influence the subject’s well-being and a belief that their intervention will succeed.

There is certainly an element of this in public, Western mandala events. The monks continue to view sand mandalas built in Western, secular settings as personal spiritual practice, requiring meditation and mindfulness in their execution. In addition, they serve as a direct spiritual intervention undertaken by the monks on behalf of the world at large. The selfless compassion that they hope to stimulate in the building is intended to transfer not only to the monks themselves, but also to observers that watch them work, the community that sponsors the event, and ultimately, the world at large. In some sense, the event becomes a public prayer offered for those outside the belief community by those inside it, and intends to have an immediate and lasting impact on the material world through the enacted rituals involved in making the prayer. Whether the observers recognize or feel the spiritual benefit

of the work done on their behalf, in the mind of the practitioner those benefits are real indeed and have a profound influence on the shape of the performance that the audience sees. That belief permeated the first Western mandala building events in 1988. In the process of transferring the practice from sacred space to public arena, 'the term "cultural offering" evolved as a means to describe this transplant of a sacred art into a cultural and anthropological institution'.¹⁹ It is an attitude that has continued to characterize subsequent public mandala building events in the west in the ensuing years.

Bryant's term foregrounds the spiritual impulses behind these public events; it also implies an inherently performative dimension to the work, for to offer something requires a gesture. And the audience, not the deity invoked, is the intended recipient of this particular gesture. The cultural offering intends to impart benefit to both the builder of the mandala and all humanity, like all the mandalas. But in these events there is an additional focus on the observing public, as it invites them to be mindful of the web of benefit by observing the prayer environment. There they can witness the work being done, and receive instruction on how it constitutes a spiritual intervention undertaken by the monks with specific results in mind. The knowledge of the audience's gaze becomes part of the monk's meditation. It should not change his outward posture or activity, of course, as that could endanger the structure, but it becomes part of the will-to-create. And that same intention influences the audience, as they perceive themselves as the intended recipients of the event. That is always part of an audience's interpretive framework—we as observers always believe that the performers present their work for our consumption—but the ritual efficacy of this performance changes the dynamic. When audiences become aware that the ceremony constitutes

a lengthy prayer with specific outcomes, their focus must shift from 'culture'—secular display of another people's art—to 'offering', sacred ritual in which they become participants by association. Whether they choose to accept it as such matters less in the moment of performance than the practitioner's declaration of purpose and successful completion of the ritual.

This is not a purely contemporary phenomenon; the *Monlam Chenmo*, the 'great prayer for the well-being of all beings', has also been a traditional part of New Year festivities among Tibetan Buddhists, during their largest yearly gathering of the monastic community.²⁰ These rituals ground themselves within the community of the faithful, occurring as part of the devotional practices of Buddhist communities in Tibet and surrounding countries. Yet they aim for the inclusion of a wider, global community in their attempts to actively transform the world. This is in keeping with the Bodhisattva's responsibility to act for the enlightenment of all conscious beings; but until recent decades, the work done on behalf of the world was done within the community of the faithful, in their particular consecrated spaces. These Western mandala buildings represent a new approach to the long-standing doctrine.²¹

My first experience of a public mandala building was in February 2003, while teaching at Oklahoma State University (OSU). With the OSU mandala building, the monks chose the *Chenrezig*, or *Avalokiteshvara*, representing the Bodhisattva of infinite compassion; organizer Brian Deer indicated at the event that the monks made the selection in response to the social climate of the United States on the eve of the current war in Iraq. Geshe Tashi Dhondup, the group's spokesman, indicated that the selection of *Avalokiteshvara*—incidentally, the Bodhisattva of whom the current Dalai Lama is said to be the reincarnation—was intended to have a direct spiritual

impact on the host community and the world. 'Out of the many different mandalas, we chose for Stillwater the mandala of compassion, so I believe because of that there will be more peace and compassion in this world.'²² Through the meditative effort of building the *Avalokiteshvara*, the monks intended and believed that the social climate of the world would be improved, hopefully decreasing the chances for the impending war or lessening its effects. In witnessing the construction and dissolution, the spectators were invited to join in this meditative practice.

Taking place in secular environments, these performances might be at risk of losing their sacred status—we have seen this happen, for example, with Native American rituals that become popular with tourist audiences. Yet the work of mandala building is able to retain its identity as devotion or prayer because the monks and organizers, such as Bryant, cast it as an *offering*. The presence of the monks and their public practice of the ritual art is intended to be a gift to the community in which it occurs as well as a political gesture advocating peaceable coexistence between nations. Moreover, they frame their efforts as devotional action on behalf of these communities and the world. As followers of this path, they take responsibility for bringing peace and enlightenment to all. ☸

Notes and References

1. A notable exception is the recent increase in writing on Buddhist-related dance, mostly in dance and movement oriented journals.
2. I have not taken refuge in the Buddhist dharma. I approach this as a performance studies scholar and fascinated observer of theatrical manifestations of religious devotion.
3. John Snelling, *The Buddhist Handbook: A Complete Guide to Buddhist Schools, Teaching, Practice, and History* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1998), 96.
4. Barry Bryant, *The Wheel of Time Sand Mandala: Visual Scripture of Tibetan Buddhism* (New York: Snow Lion, 2003), 21.
5. David E R George, *Buddhism as/in Performance: Analysis of Meditation and Theatrical Practice* (New Delhi: DK Printworld, 1999), 108.
6. Robert A F Thurman, *Essential Tibetan Buddhism* (San Francisco: Harper, 1995), 9.
7. *The Wheel of Time Sand Mandala*, 21.
8. *Buddhism as/in Performance*, 114.
9. *The Wheel of Time Sand Mandala*, 21.
10. See <<http://www.tsawamonksusa.com/index.html>> accessed 21 June 2014.
11. The specific requirements for each mandala building event in the US has varied over the last decade. For example, in the case of the Guhyasamaja sand mandala at Samaya Foundation, the attending monk required a 'thekpu', a mandala house, be built. On the other hand, for the 2003 Chenrezig/Avalokiteshvara mandala at Oklahoma State University, the monks simply asked for string and a ruler painted blue.
12. Brian Deer, the organizer for a mandala building event at Oklahoma State University, to which I was witness, refers to the effort as a 'grain by grain exercise in patience'.
13. *The Wheel of Time Sand Mandala*, 32.
14. *Buddhism as/in Performance*, 26.
15. Martin J Boord, 'Mandala Meaning and Method: Ritual Delineation of Sacred Space in Tantric Buddhism', *Performance Research*, 3/1 (Spring, 1998), 79–84.
16. *The Wheel of Time Sand Mandala*, 27.
17. See *The Wheel of Time Sand Mandala*, 110.
18. 'Monks Making Mandala, Music to Raise Money', <http://www.ocolly.com/article_583d953c-3863-5864-949b-92e3a9c-d1ae1.html> accessed 21 June 2014.
19. *The Wheel of Time Sand Mandala*, 28.
20. For more details, see Claude Levenson, *Symbols of Tibetan Buddhism* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2000), 75–6.
21. The events have now a more than thirty-year of history in the US and elsewhere, so in that sense they are not 'new' anymore though they are still a relatively new phenomenon in the broader context of ritual arts history.
22. 'OSU Sponsors Buddhist Conference', <http://www.phayul.com/news/tools/print.aspx?id=3807&t=1>, accessed 21 June 2014.

Search for Meaning through Prayer

Swami Satyamayananda

ASWAMI ONCE GAVE a copy of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* to a gentleman for reading. He came back after a couple of days and returned the book while passing caustic remarks on it. A few years later the same gentleman met the swami again and humbly asked for the book saying: 'I now realize that Sri Ramakrishna's teachings are the only solution to the individual and collective problems that humanity is facing.' That learned gentleman was correct and fortunately realized that too. More fortunate are those who get drawn to Sri Ramakrishna after having read his life and teachings just once. Subsequent readings draw one closer and closer to Sri Ramakrishna in a process of discovering one's spiritual dimensions.

Opening the Doors of Spirituality

The life of Sri Ramakrishna is a wonderful journey of knowing how an avatara is born, grows, develops into a sadhaka, and finally into a perfected being. His visions and spiritual experiences captivate and lead us into the vast spiritual world convincing us, in this age of scepticism, of the existence of God. For centuries the secrets and subtle teachings of yoga and Vedanta, which were the domain of specialists and pundits, were at once made simple and open to all. There is a deeper aspect in that we become connected with Sri Ramakrishna. Somewhere deep down in our being we are looking for answers to our questions and searching for the meaning of life. We amazingly find our questions answered and obtain the direction to make life meaningful.

However, after an initial elation and bonding with Sri Ramakrishna, we become dismayed and disheartened at the stupendous strength of body and mind required to realize God and enjoy everlasting bliss. When we compare Sri Ramakrishna's struggles with our own, we feel incompetent and without stamina for the task at hand, in spite of his assurance that we need to do only one-sixteenth of what he did. We find ourselves too weak to practise even a simple teaching of Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that in this age human life is dependent on food and also that humans are naturally weak. Sri Ramakrishna's herculean sadhana of various spiritual disciplines of different religions—both recorded and not recorded—show that his central approach was through prayer, which does not require excessive strength.

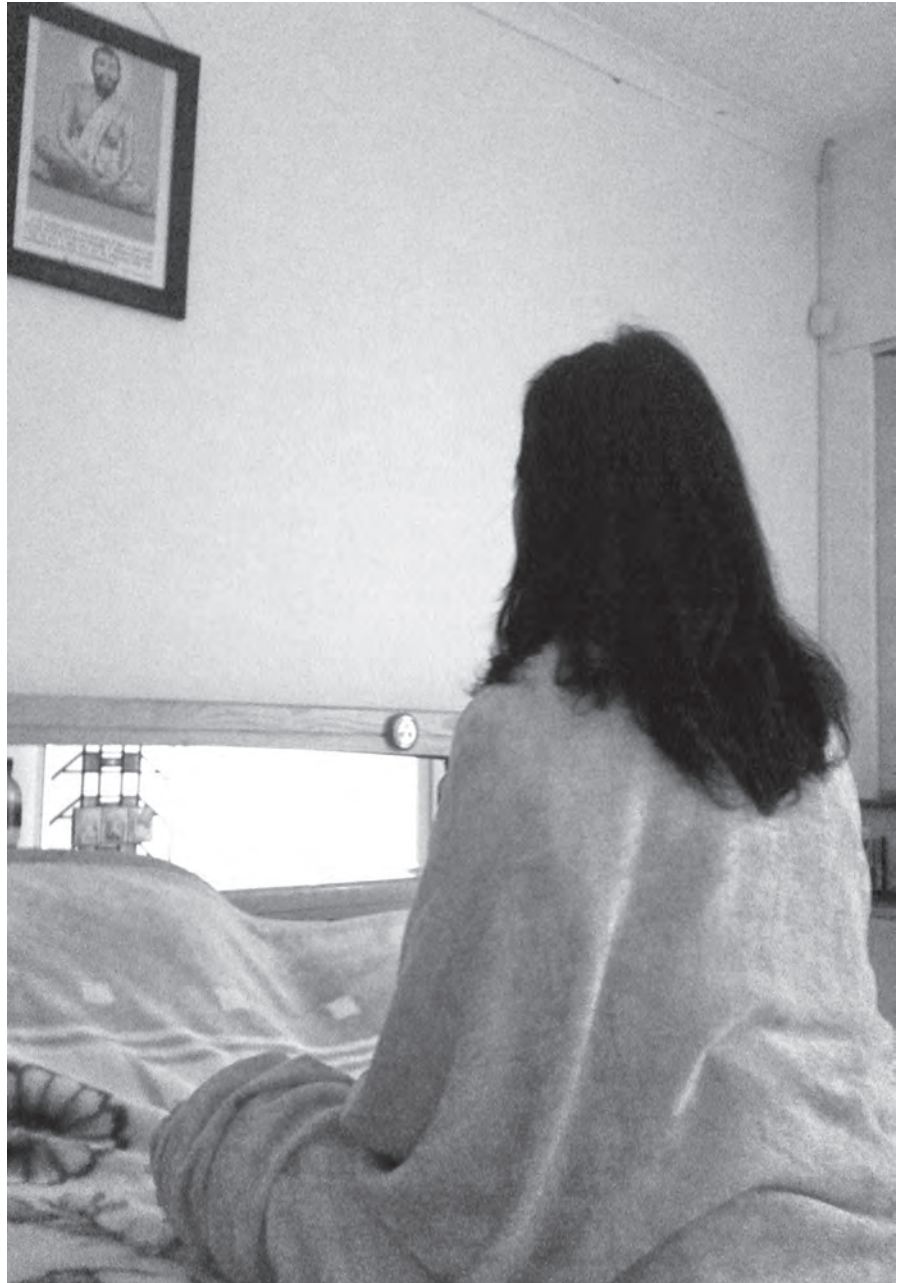
Sri Ramakrishna's life was an exploration of the vast discipline of prayer. No aspect of prayer was left untouched by him, and his personality was entirely prayer-centred. The prayers of Sri Ramakrishna at the beginning of his sadhana at Dakshineswar were the best. There was no direction, no guidance, and no technicalities—there was only the intensity of prayer. Today we know how a new spiritual history was written through them. The core of Sri Ramakrishna and the main path to realize him and his teachings is prayer.

After the initial glamour of practising yoga and Vedanta wears off, we once again have to face our real selves. Sri Ramakrishna brings us back to reality by breaking our egos and illusions. When we realize our helplessness, then

this very helplessness turns into a strong yearning for the Divine. Sri Ramakrishna is graciously divesting us of everything and preparing us for prayer. He himself used to remove all his clothes and even his sacred thread before praying. This was his way of going beyond the eight fetters of shame, hatred, fear, cast, lineage, good conduct, grief, and secretiveness.

Attitude for Prayer

We see from Sri Ramakrishna's life that his attitude was like that of a child. Prayer to God with the attitude of a child is perhaps the best means for this age; all other kinds of attitudes are inferior. To Sri Ramakrishna, God was Mother. In this relationship the idea of power, glory, and separation are all obliterated. A child knows that the Mother will reciprocate and so feels free with her.



When we pray we are also connected to the whole world. Good thoughts flow into us just as our prayers flow out towards everyone. The whole world feels the prayers of a great soul, including all the living beings and inanimate

nature. As this world is connected to the vast mental and spiritual worlds, so also we become connected with those realms.

We do not have to be formal to pray. Prayer is a conversation with God. We must be able to tell God everything that we feel. This brings a kind of deep connection. We feel we are not alone and we have somebody who loves and cares for us. There is no particular time and place for prayer and it can be done anywhere.

Sri Ramakrishna has shown that prayer should be sincere. He says: 'God listens to the prayer of a sincere heart,'¹ and, 'A man can realize God by following his own path if his prayer is sincere' (596). An unselfish prayer is answered sooner than selfish prayers. Sri Ramakrishna did not recommend prayers that may harm someone as the person praying thus may be harmed instead. Moreover, although prayers for material gains are acceptable, even better than this, are prayers for spiritual progress which tend to be quickly granted. Sincerity and yearning are thus the two main ingredients of prayer. Sri Ramakrishna says: 'God will certainly listen to your prayers if you feel restless for Him' (384). In fact, Sri Ramakrishna also demonstrated once before the devotees how to pray:

The devotees seated in the room looked at Sri Ramakrishna as he began to chant the sweet name of the Divine Mother. After the chanting he began to pray. What was the need of prayer to a soul in constant communion with God? Did he not rather want to teach erring mortals how to pray? Addressing the Divine Mother, he said, 'O Mother, I throw myself on Thy mercy; I take shelter at Thy Hallowed Feet. I do not want bodily comforts; I do not crave name and fame; I do not seek the eight occult powers. Be gracious and grant that I may have pure love for Thee, a love unsmitten by desire, untainted by

any selfish ends—a love craved by the devotee for the sake of love alone. And grant me the favour, O Mother, that I may not be deluded by Thy world-bewitching maya, that I may never be attached to the world, to 'woman and gold', conjured up by Thy inscrutable maya! O Mother, there is no one but Thee whom I may call my own. Mother, I do not know how to worship; I am without austerity; I have neither devotion nor knowledge. Be gracious, Mother, and out of Thy infinite mercy grant me love for Thy Lotus Feet.' Every word of this prayer, uttered from the depths of his soul, stirred the minds of the devotees. The melody of his voice and the childlike simplicity of his face touched their hearts very deeply (731).

The Transformation of Personality

Intense prayer is like connecting ourselves to a powerhouse. To use two other simile, it is like emerging out of a narrow channel into a vast ocean, or feeling like a freed bird in the open sky. One can pray while weeping, laughing, working—at all times. In fact, most of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings are about how to pray, the manner and the necessary attitude. After the bonding has been established and one begins to pray unceasingly, one obtains, delight that leads to ecstatic love for God.

The powerful stream of prayer gets internalized, for when we have been praying to Sri Ramakrishna as outside of ourselves, we gradually begin to feel him inside us. This is a clear indication of our minds and bodies becoming pure. Not that the external aspect is discarded while internalizing things, as the idea of the sacred comes in very strongly, but his name, his form, his picture, everything associated with him becomes holy and sacred. This idea of sacredness is pervasive and it brings in humility and love. We thus grow through prayers and go closer and closer to God. 'God is our Inner Controller,' says Sri Ramakrishna (636).

Through constant prayer remarkable transformation of personality takes place. One feels the inner voice of God more and more in everything one does. One listens more to this voice than the clamour and confusion of the world. One feels constantly guided in not just one's deeds and words but also in one's thoughts. Through prayer our personality becomes divinized and the world too becomes divinized. No longer does one complain that the world is horrible, because one is in touch with God while praying. Slowly this guidance completely takes over the personality and then one feels that everything is being done through God's will. Once Swami Vivekananda told his brother disciple Swami Turiyananda to stay in America and work: 'It is the will of the Divine Mother that you should take charge of the work there.' Turiyananda jokingly remarked: 'Rather say it is *your* will. Certainly you have not heard the Mother communicate Her will to you in that way. How can we hear the words of the Mother?' 'Yes brother,' said Swamiji with great emotion, 'yes, the words of the Mother can be heard as clearly as we hear one another. It only requires a fine nerve to hear the words of the Mother.'² Needless to say that Turiyananda acquiesced and also realized in a short while that the Divine Mother was constantly guiding him, that every movement of his was due to her power flowing through him. This fact was attested to by all the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, who also emphasized the efficacy of prayer for self-surrender.

Conclusion

As we grow in spirituality, we discover that Indian culture and tradition, stretching through thousands of years, is built upon prayers. Not only Indians but all of humanity has been praying to it, him, or her, for as long as people understood that there is a higher power that can be

invoked and propitiated. Various religious systems have actually been the outcome of this innate need of humanity. Prayer is found in all religions and cultures, from the crudest to the most refined, and has supported the development of human beings on the right track while maintaining sanity, holiness, and purity. Without religion humans would have remained at the brutish level. Religion has civilized humanity. Prayer is integral to the human soul and humanity's essence. As we pray, we join the innumerable prayers being said at that time all over the world, and we also connect with the prayers of humanity from time immemorial. Thus prayers are universal, and those who pray become universal. As prayers done in the past have helped us in the present, so will our prayers of today help those who will pray in the future. Prayers finally lead us to the goal of all prayers: God. This God has come down to the world as an avatara many times, and in this age God has come as Sri Ramakrishna in order to teach and help us to pray.

As we keep on reading more and more of Sri Ramakrishna in the *Gospel*, we feel as if he is addressing us directly and solving our problems as well. Sri Ramakrishna says: 'You must pray standing near the Kalpataru. Only then will your prayer be fulfilled.'³ We have come today to Sri Ramakrishna, who is the Kalpataru, the wish-fulfilling tree! Our prayers will be fulfilled and we also shall be filled by the Lord. This is the path and the goal of bringing meaning to our lives through prayer.



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Swami Vivekananda's Words on Vedanta

Swami Aparananda

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S WORDS touch the heart and stir feelings of joy, hope, happiness, and blessings. Words of the immortal nature of the soul pour out from him thus:

Hear, ye children of immortal bliss! Even ye that reside in higher spheres! I have found the Ancient One, who is beyond all darkness, all delusion: knowing Him alone you shall be saved from death over again. 'Children of immortal bliss'—what a sweet, what a hopeful name! Allow me to call you, brethren, by that sweet name—heirs of immortal bliss—yea, the Hindu refuses to call you sinners. Ye are the Children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye Divinities on earth—sinners! It is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature. Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep; you are souls immortal, spirit free; blest and eternal, ye are not matter, ye are not bodies; matter is your servant, not you the servant of matter.¹

The echoes of these words still ring in our hearts more than a hundred years later. The story is long to tell, and all the more difficult to integrate in our life! As Swamiji says:

Sharp as the blade of a razor, long and difficult and hard to cross, is the way to freedom. The sages have declared this again and again. Yet do not let these weaknesses and failures bind you. The Upanishads have declared, 'Arise! Awake! and stop not until the goal is reached.' We will then certainly cross the path, sharp as it is like the razor, and long and distant and difficult though it be. Man becomes the master of gods and demons. No one is to blame for our miseries but ourselves (1.342).

Steps towards Freedom

We need courage and enthusiasm to take each step towards freedom. Following religious ideals in our life requires a strong determination, but in the beginning such determination is difficult to acquire and even more difficult to maintain. Without proper encouragement a person may lose faith in the ideal and go astray. And unless there is a proper understanding of the true nature of the spiritual reality, the mind in all probability will remain immersed only in material things. To follow a religious life we need to have a correct understanding of the meaning of many terms, such as knowledge and yoga.

Knowledge denotes understanding spirituality, the Self, Ishvara—the Lord—divine Consciousness, immortality, and so on, as taught by the scriptures and teachers. Yoga is the effort of transforming that knowledge into direct experience through spiritual practices such as meditation, self-control, unselfish action, and so on.

In order to come in contact with the divine Being, the unchangeable One, obstacles within the mind need to be overcome—doubts, confusion, misunderstandings, and many others. The individual soul is making its journey in this cosmic life with the help of the body-mind complex. In this passage of life the journey to reach the abode of the supreme Soul is neither easy nor smooth. The mind-body complex is always working under the spell of ignorance—its true identity remains hidden, unknown. Innumerable good and evil tendencies are at work, producing pleasure and pain, love and hatred, knowledge and ignorance, success and failure,

and so on. The ultimate goal of life appears to us as through a haze, and we look on with an uncertain hope.

The Social Scene

With the advance of material civilization, ever-new forms of industries, enterprises, and work-models have been created and then thrust upon society. Artificial 'needs' have become the demanding conditions of life, and fierce competition causes us to be in constant conflict. Outgoing tendencies are guiding an individual's life-force in so many different directions. The result is that people have very little time even to think of the higher ideals of life. Uneasiness, restlessness, loss of vigour, and inability to restrain damaging impulses and emotions are the outcome of present-day conditions.

Some communities have built better facilities for education, jobs, sports, and amusements for the benefit of their members. But ultimately, all these benefits and facilities operate within the perimeter of a sense-bound life. Fear and uncertainty cannot be overcome by following the current social systems, nor can there be any genuine peace or spiritual enlightenment.

Swami Vivekananda defines education as 'the manifestation of the perfection already in man', and religion is 'the manifestation of the divinity already in man'.

Under the current sense-bound life, attaining divine joy and knowledge—or, for that matter, even contemplating divine truths—appears to be out of the question. Swami Vivekananda's divine mission in this present day is to make divinity a fact of life.



PAINTING: SWAMI TADATMANANDA

These days questions are asked about spiritual life and its practices. Are those spiritual means effective? What types of knowledge and feelings will these practices bring? Words like 'renunciation', 'detachment', as well as phrases like 'the world is unreal' never fail to provoke a reaction in modern minds. Will these spiritual practices maintain peace and good interpersonal relations? The answer is yes, if these spiritual practices are performed with a genuine spirit and under the guidance of an able teacher. Swami Vivekananda is a teacher of that calibre. Here is an example of that guidance:

If one millionth part of the men and women who live in this world simply sit down and for a few minutes say, 'You are all God, O ye men and O ye animals and living beings, you are all the manifestations of the one living Deity!' the whole world will be changed in half an hour. Instead of throwing tremendous bombshells of hatred into every corner, instead of projecting currents of jealousy and of evil thought, in every country people will think that it is all He. He is all that you see and feel. How can you see evil until there is evil in you? How can you see the thief, until he is there, sitting in the heart of your heart? How can you see the murderer until you are yourself the murderer? Be good, and evil will vanish for you. The whole universe will thus be changed. This is the greatest gain to society. This is the great gain to the human organism. These thoughts were thought out, worked out amongst individuals in ancient times in India. For various reasons, such as the exclusiveness of the teachers and foreign conquest, those thoughts were not allowed to spread. Yet they are grand truths; and wherever they have been working, man has become divine (2.287-8).

The subjects discussed in religion are God, the soul, the hereafter, evolution, matter, spirit, duty, merit and demerit, social service, and the like. In its bound state, the individual self considers the visible world to be all. However, after

the spiritual awareness of divine Consciousness, the individual soul recognizes its identity with the universal Soul, and duality disappears. Thus yoga is the basis of all religious practices. Religion and spiritual ideals emphasize certain psychological approaches to self-unfoldment, including various means and methods to assist different types of human minds—active, philosophical, emotional, and psychic.

As soon as the individual soul takes on a physical body, until the moment it gives it up, it undergoes different stages of evolution. The knowledge and experience gained from a lifetime of actions and duties become the impelling force for the next reincarnation. This is the law of life. But again and again Swami Vivekananda emphasizes that a human being possesses higher forms of spiritual knowledge and powers that are at present in a dormant state. The human life is not for mere self-expression. All of one's knowledge and abilities can be directed in such a way that there will be self-unfoldment while living in the physical body—and that is the meaning and purpose of human life. A time will come in each one's life when the discerning self is able to discover that a living power is constantly trying to unfold from within the heart. Such is Swami Vivekananda's doctrine of God-consciousness. A well-regulated life can work wonders in the field of self-unfoldment—that is what Swami Vivekananda teaches us. Swamiji says: 'The great truths about atoms, and the finer elements, and the fine perceptions of men, were discovered ages ago by men who never saw a telescope, or a microscope, or a laboratory. How did they know all these things? It was through the heart; they purified the heart. It is open to us to do the same today; it is the culture of the heart, really, and not that of the intellect that will lessen the misery of the world' (1.414).

Religious activities help people to be more indrawn. Leading a spiritual life is necessary for

experiencing transcendental truths. As Swami Vivekananda says:

Just as a piece of iron, which had been covered with the dust of centuries, might be lying near a magnet all the time, and yet not be attracted by it, but as soon as the dust is cleared away, the iron is drawn by the magnet; so, when the human soul, covered with the dust of ages, impurities, wickedness, and sins, after many births, becomes purified enough by these forms and ceremonies, by doing good to others, loving other beings, its natural spiritual attraction comes, it wakes up and struggles towards God (2.46).

The Spiritual Scenario

Many good and cultured people want to stay away from the religious institutions of the world. These religious institutions cannot draw the attention of such people. When people witness the hatred and fighting among the followers of any religion, many good-natured people turn away, though the sugar of transcendental truths may be buried under the sand of sectarianism. True religion teaches us to love others, to give service to others. True religion compels us to restrain our impulses and to help others do the same. This, it seems, religious institutions can or will not do. These religious institutions fall under the category of 'domestic' religion—the idea being that domestic religions serve the purpose of bringing communities of people together. But in communal life, ideological clashes are inevitable. Religion is not at fault for creating clashes among people. Says Swami Vivekananda:

Do not think that people do not like religion. I do not believe that. The preachers cannot give them what they need. The same man that may have been branded as an atheist, as a materialist, or what not, may meet a man who gives him the truth needed by him, and he may turn out the most spiritual man in the community. We can eat only in our own way.

... Not only the food should be supplied, but it should be taken in your own particular way. Not only must you have the spiritual ideas, but they must come to you according to your own method. They must speak your own language, the language of your soul, and then alone they will satisfy you. When the man comes who speaks my language and gives truth in my language, I at once understand it and receive it forever. This is a great fact (2.368–9).

Swami Vivekananda comments that, 'Religion is the greatest motive power for realizing that infinite energy which is the birthright and nature of every man. In building up character, in making for everything that is good and great, in bringing peace to others and peace to one's own self, religion is the highest motive power and, therefore, ought to be studied from that standpoint. Religion must be studied on a broader basis than formerly' (2.67).

Can religious facts and transcendental truths be brought to the minds of modern humanity? The modern person looks up to reason and seeks to rationally verify the truths of religion. Faith alone does not satisfy the modern person. Can 'consciousness', which is regarded by religious followers as an independent entity beyond mind and body, be verified? Can religious truths be verified, just as scientific facts can be proven in the laboratory? And are these religious truths relevant and warranted in modern day-to-day life? These days people agree to abide by 'social moralities', on the basis of society's laws, in order to prevent disturbances in community life. One is expected to perform one's particular duties, whether in political office, academic institutions, or commercial settings, and try to live a 'decent' life. Religious life, on the other hand, demands observance of traditional moral principles, such as non-injury, truthfulness, non-stealing, and so on. And these moral principles

must be learned from an authentic teacher, like Sri Ramakrishna. We must remember, in the light of this modern need for verification, that most of the world's religions function on a pre-supposition of God's reality, whose existence is known through prayer, adoration, meditation, and the like, which brings joy, satisfaction, and blessings upon humanity.

In their day-to-day lives, most people experience an inner restlessness, a deep boredom, a conscience that is haunted. They feel a desire for self-expression, for name and fame. All of this leads to the experience of pleasure and pain, love and hatred, knowledge and ignorance, and so forth. Many follow spiritual practices—they chant divine names, adore divine forms, meditate. The question of reason, of rationality and knowledge of the ultimate Reality does not ordinarily come to such minds. In this way they find self-satisfaction and they believe in God without any deep enquiry.

The most minute and subtlest things that exist in the universe cannot be detected by even the most sophisticated technology; knowledge of such things cannot be attained through the power of the sense organs. The ancient sages developed another faculty of understanding, which is called *bodhi*, deeper consciousness. The *rishis* awakened the subtle powers of the mind and senses by means of concentration and self-control. They made the scattered mind one-pointed. As the power of concentration increased, the seeker became aware of deeper planes, finer existences. Instinct, reason, intuition, or higher consciousness—these are the three instruments of knowledge, which are the successive stages of the same mind. Hence, a lower state can develop into a higher one. No external instruments are required, only appropriate internally-directed disciplines. The Upanishads teach the Truth, unknown to the sense

organs, regarding living beings, the universe, and God; they teach the relationship between matter and spirit. Knowledge of superconsciousness is the focus of the Upanishads.

Swami Vivekananda says in 'The Necessity of Religion':

A tremendous statement is made by all religions; that the human mind, at certain moments, transcends not only the limitations of the senses, but also the power of reasoning. It then comes face to face with facts which it could never have sensed, could never have reasoned out. These facts are the basis of all the religions of the world. Of course we have the right to challenge these facts, to put them to the test of reason. Nevertheless, all the existing religions of the world claim for the human mind this peculiar power of transcending the limits of the senses and the limits of reason; and this power they put forward as a statement of fact (2.61).

Centuries ago Acharya Shankara said that in this world three things are very rare: a human body, desire for spiritual knowledge, and association with an illumined soul. According to Swami Vivekananda, a human being possesses infinite knowledge, infinite power, and infinite possibilities. Our higher faculties are now only dormant. Through proper culture these faculties will be awakened. This is the process of self-unfoldment. So Swamiji says: 'Man, therefore, according to the Vedanta philosophy, is the greatest being that is in the universe, and this world of work the best place in it, because only herein is the greatest and the best chance for him to become perfect. Angels or gods, whatever you may call them, have all to become men, if they want to become perfect. This is the great center, the wonderful poise, and the wonderful opportunity—this human life' (2.271).

The realization of this transcendent Absolute

whose nature is pure Consciousness, absolute Existence, and absolute Bliss, is an inexpressible experience in which the distinction between subject, object, and knowledge is annihilated and the three become one. The universal God, the universal conscious Being, is the indwelling Soul. It is projecting itself as individual beings and the material world. If that divine Being were beyond our reach, how is it that a saint or enlightened soul can experience and then communicate supreme knowledge to others? How can we know that divine Truth in our own lives? A great teacher like Swami Vivekananda brings that knowledge right to us, because we *are* That, because self-unfoldment is possible in human evolution—self-unfoldment *is* human evolution. The human body is merely a vehicle; the one embodied is the actual being. This embodied being truly is the divine Being, who works through two important faculties. The first faculty of mind is the organ of perception, by means of which one is able to create, to experience pleasure and pain, elation and depression, and so on. The other faculty is determinative faculty of the mind, called the *buddhi*, intelligence, which deals with the knowledge aspect of the divine Being.


Both these faculties, when well-regulated, have the possibility of expressing tremendous power. Sri Ramakrishna teaches the different aspects of divine Consciousness. Swami Vivekananda describes this divine Consciousness as ‘cosmic Intelligence’, as the ‘universal living Being’. He says:

Do you know how much energy, how many powers, how many forces are still lurking behind that frame of yours? What scientist has known all that is in man? Millions of years have passed since man first came here, and yet but one infinitesimal part of his powers has been manifested. Therefore, you must not say that

you are weak. How do you know what possibilities lie behind that degradation on the surface? You know but little of that which is within you. For behind you is the ocean of infinite power and blessedness (2.301–2).

In his Raja Yoga, Swamiji further explains:

The Yogi teaches that the mind itself has a higher state of existence, beyond reason, a superconscious state, and when the mind gets to that higher state, then this knowledge, beyond reasoning, comes to man. Metaphysical and transcendental knowledge comes to that man. This state of going beyond reason, transcending ordinary human nature, may sometimes come by chance to a man who does not understand its science; he, as it were, stumbles upon it. When he stumbles upon it, he generally interprets it as coming from outside. So this explains why an inspiration, or transcendental knowledge, may be the same in different countries, but in one country it will seem to come through an angel, and in another through a Deva, and in a third through God. What does it mean? It means that the mind brought the knowledge by its own nature, and that the finding of the knowledge was interpreted according to the belief and education of the person through whom it came. The real fact is that these various men, as it were, stumbled upon this superconscious state (1.183–4).

The thoughts, ideas, and courses of study that Swami Vivekananda has given to the world will continue to work far into the foreseeable future. In our own lives each one of us can find something beneficial from him. Ultimately, meditation on Swami Vivekananda is not different from the working out of his thoughts in our life. 

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Eternal Words

Swami Adbhutananda

Compiled by Swami Siddhananda; translated by Swami Sarvadevananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

EVEN IF YOU RECEIVE all these material objects, you should realize that they are like worthless clay to a person of renunciation; the guru is the only truth. Brahman alone is the truth. You have already heard the words from the Master's holy mouth and now you have received still greater help observing the ideal of Swamiji's life. So, if all of you can spend your life following their footsteps, that will be the glory of the Master. He whose seven hundred brother disciples are naked, whose guru is also naked, who himself is naked, feels joy in seeing such naked sadhus. The Master used to say that some king gave silver plates and glasses as gifts after feeding his seven hundred brother disciples. Yet, they remained the same, naked as before—all of you should understand the implication of these words. Perhaps you might have heard that the Master was the king among the sadhus. Moreover, I am also reminding you of what he said. We are his renunciate children. There is no one greater than the guru. So, one should not become overly excited in the joy of that 'clay'; one should be extremely joyful only in Brahman or in one's guru. Can anyone obtain exceeding joy from mere matter? Consciousness alone has the power to fill a person with joy.

We are his children. If someone calls us crazy, even then they will at least once take the name of the Master. They will say: 'This disciple of Sri Ramakrishna has become crazy!' It is our joy if someone even once takes the name of the Master.

If someone praises you, your chest expands

five and a half cubits, and the moment someone slanders you, your mind contracts. I see that this is the habit of people. One is highly fortunate whose mind does not waver in the least at praise or blame. It may be said that God's special grace is upon him.

If you can spend your life in a pure manner without marrying, you will be saved from this world. All suffering comes as soon as one gets married. Today there is the disease of wife, tomorrow of the child, the day after tomorrow the child dies; one has to be engaged day and night with this type of anxiety. There is no happiness for a moment. If one does not marry, the suffering runs only through one's body—the mind remains free from anxiety of wife, children, and so on—this is the difference.

My dear, is there anything worse than the bereavement for one's son? The Master used to say: 'Only one who has been grief-stricken for his son can understand what is called bereavement for one's son! If a person is grief-stricken for his son, others should not say anything to hurt him lest unnecessary doubts arise in his mind.' At that time the Master used to give advice after understanding the person's mental state; that is why no one ever had the least doubt towards him at any time.

One may commit a blunder and still show anger. One may create ruckus if given some advice. This type of attitude is mostly found in this world. That is why there is such a confusion.

They come only to make me talk; they

themselves do not practise anything. What benefit will come by associating with these type of persons? It will bring ruin. They themselves do not do devotional or spiritual practices, neither do they allow others to do them.

All relationships are focused around the body. When the body is healthy, everything seems good. When the body becomes sick, no one takes notice of you. You also feel as if nothing has any appeal.

Is there ever any hope for an embodied being? To make their own intelligence and ideas appear great, they cast aside the immediate help they are receiving.

Everyone will have to cry; there is no alternative but to weep. Some are weeping for their brothers, some for their children. Those who weep for their brothers and children are ordinary people; those who weep for God are truly fortunate souls.

Keep loving relations among brothers. One may engage in earning money; the other may contemplate on God. Spend your days in this manner. Why do I love you two brothers? Both of you have that attitude, and in the name of God neither of you has married. You are genuinely living by mastering your senses. This is what is wanted! That is the reason I love you. I do not love you because of your money.

Nowadays you are all creating a big uproar to receive the sacred thread. Keshab Sen threw away the sacred thread. The Master threw away the sacred thread. You are all clamouring for those things that they have thrown away. Will four arms grow if you take the sacred thread? Spiritual practice is the primary thing. You have not done spiritual practices. What will be achieved by taking the sacred thread? Let the Kshatriyas perform their Kshatriya duties; let the Vaishyas perform their Vaishya duties. It is enough if that happens. There is no spiritual practice—just a

loud uproar to get the sacred thread! You should renounce such limiting superimpositions; instead, you are adding more. As much as your titles reduce, so much conducive it will be to realize God. One cannot realize him unless one is devoid of limiting superimpositions.

The religions and doctrines of Acharya Shankara and Buddha are almost the same. But at the time of Buddha rituals were not prevalent. Acharya Shankara rekindled and increased those rituals. He revealed the four holy places of pilgrimage—Dwaraka, Badarikashrama, Rameshwaram, and Jagannath.

Anger and ego are very bad—both are people's enemies. One cannot recognize one's true self while under the influence of anger and ego. Moreover, it is a sin to be violent. That is why Buddha said that non-injury is the highest dharma. There was no trace of hatred or sin in the mind of Yudhishtira. As much envy a person gives up, so much purer he will be. One will have peace of mind. The mind of a hateful person is impure and utterly restless. If you want peace, give up hatred.

Everything is attained by the grace of the guru and God, and one gets intoxicated in Brahman. That is all. It is not good to be drunk with other things; that gives no such joy. 'I drink no ordinary wine; I drink the nectar saying victory to Kali.' This is the right attitude. The intoxication in Brahman would take hold of the Master—that was a state of overflowing bliss. Even his legs would tremble and people would think that he had drunk wine. But such things would happen as the result of his intoxication in Brahman.

Listening to the reading of the Bhagavata brought the right result for Parikshit. After listening to the Bhagavata, observing everything, and being totally free from doubt, he said: 'I am no more afraid of giving up this body'. It is not enough if one merely listens to the Bhagavata;

one must acquire the strength to assimilate it.

There is no restriction for the male devotees of the Master regarding what they eat and wear; but they should be extremely cautious about women. Eat and dress very well, that will be more than enough; but do not commit any mischief.

What purpose will it serve if one writes or memorizes spiritual instructions? It should penetrate the heart. These worldly people have no spiritual practice and so they forget the instructions. They work according to their own inner propensities. They cheat people. It is fruitless to give advice to such people. My dear, can it be the end of all if one merely writes spiritual instructions? One should hold them in one's mind and act accordingly, only then can the result be obtained. Memorizing a few words, people start giving instructions to one and all! See the plight! First, have some experience in your own life, then only will you gain the power to give advice. When nothing has happened to you, from which stock will you give to others? That is why the sages would not give instruction to just anyone and everyone. They would make them practise severe austerities before giving them instruction. Perhaps they used to say, 'Come back after going on holy pilgrimages, then I shall give you instruction'.

A sadhu is lost if he falls under the control of honour and prestige. That is verily a weakness. When the weakness catches hold of one, disease develops; then it is difficult to get cured. A sadhu should consider worthless all those ideas of honour and prestige. One who cannot adopt that attitude will surely fall short of the goal.

Can you not come to a sadhu before your sons and daughters are born? You have so many children and are faced with suffering in the family, that is why you have come to a sadhu now. What will a sadhu do about that? You got happiness but you don't want to experience suffering. Don't you

know that suffering follows happiness? We are not that type of sadhus who can 'turn dirt into gold'. Realizing God, we have attained peace. I ask those who come here to call upon God. I am also asking you to take refuge in God and call upon him with your heart and soul. If you do, you will attain peace even in the midst of suffering and pain. We do not know anything else.

If such and such person is bad, what is that to you? What do you understand about good and bad? God knows his children and who is good and bad. Whom you think to be good is perhaps bad in God's eyes; again, in his eyes, perhaps he is good whom you think to be bad. We discriminate between good and bad with the help of this little intellect of ours. What is the proof that we can rightly analyse this? Whomever I am calling good today, probably tomorrow I will call that very man bad. As little time as it takes for us to call someone bad, so little time does it take for us to say someone is good. He who knows God can verily say who is good and who is bad; he alone knows for sure the difference between good and bad.

In their journey to God, sadhus collect inspiration from whichever direction their minds move. The great soul Tulsidas was the son of a poor Brahmin. Kabir was the son of a fisherman. Along the way, they collected so many spiritual instructions full of such truths! These two couplets of Kabir are really nice—

*Chalti chakki dekh kar miya Kabira roye,
Do patan ki beech aa sabut gaya na koyi,
Chalti chakki sab koyi dekhe keel dekhe na koyi,
Jo keel ko pakad rahe sabut rahe hain oyi.*

The meaning is this: Watching the rotation of grinding stones Kabir is crying, seeing that no grain can remain intact once it falls between the two grinding stones. Everyone sees the turning of the grinder, but no one sees the central peg upon

which the stones are set. Only that grain that takes refuge or holds on to the central peg remains intact; it does not get pulverized under the pressure of the grinder. In the same manner, people see only this world and die, being crushed between the duality of happiness and misery. But only those who take refuge in the Master of this world escape the dual hands of happiness and misery.

One day the Master said: 'Nothing at all will happen without renunciation.' Listening to that Ram Babu and Suresh Mitra appeared before the Master at Dakshineswar. Ram Babu said: 'We will also stay here.' Hearing this the Master said: 'Why will you eat food begged as alms? You will eat after distributing food to others. You will get everything by staying in the world; I am taking responsibility for all of you.' After that they returned home following the Master's instructions. The Master is the indweller; he instructs each one according to their competence. The Master knew that this [renunciation] was not the path for them. Ram Babu and Suresh Mitra attained peace and did much good to society by obeying the Master's instructions. Don't you see how, at the end, Ram Babu stayed at Kankurgachhi giving up his hearth and home?

Some bound souls say: 'The world will come to an end without marriage. Why do you object to people going for marriage? If everyone decides not to marry, what will be the condition of women?' Watch what they say! I say: 'Is God, to whom this entire universe belongs, sound asleep? What is the need of your having such a headache over this? He is only saying what God is making him say. If it is his wish to extinguish his creation, will you in that case be able to preserve it? In your mind there is desire for enjoyment, that is why you are saying such words. Are you holding up this creation? Others cannot live according to your whims. What is the need for your trepidation in regard to what will happen

to women? Whatever he wishes, that alone will happen. Go on doing whatever you want to do. This type of hypocrisy is not good.

We have become so selfish that we do not look after others at their time of difficulties and dangers. We hide our faces in fear lest we have to give them help. We do not think that one day we also may face such danger and need others' help. As I do not see them at their time of distress, why will others see me at the time of my suffering? Day and night we keep busy with gossip and slander; we cannot look at another's promotion—we rather become morose. That is why Swamiji used to say: 'A slave nation is only content to be trampled underfoot.'

There is a close relationship between the body and the mind. When one becomes sick, one becomes irritated; nothing is to one's liking. If the body becomes unwell, the mind also becomes unwell. In the same way, if the mind becomes weak, the body also weakens. Through practice the mind can remain strong even when the body is ailing. This state can be achieved if one does spiritual practices. That is why the sadhus can remain very peaceful though going through much suffering.

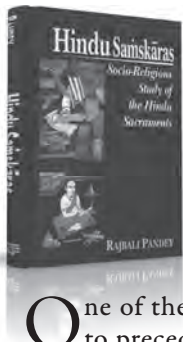
Great souls don't see the faults of others because they see that the world is permeated by Lord Vishnu. If the sadhus take any offence, God himself will punish the offender. This is written in the Puranas.

One day, after coming from his office, one of our brother disciples suddenly appeared before the Master. The Master asked: 'What is the matter? Why did you come now?' He replied: 'You can easily understand.' Hearing that, the Master said: 'Deposit some money in the name of your wife.' After a few days his wife died. His father was very devout—as is the father, so is his son. He obeyed the instructions of the Master.

(To be continued)

REVIEWS

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U A Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar,
Delhi 110 007. Website: www.mldb.com. 2013. xxvii + 327 pp. ₹ 395.

One of the ways in which existence is made to precede essence is to deny a contingent being of agency. That is, Hindus are made to say that they exist spatio-temporally first and thus are Hindus. Any deviation from this imperialist cartographical normativity is decried as being an extremist position. What is a measured structuralist position is imposed on them as the universal Truth. This coercive reading of history has been sadly pushed down Hindu throats by the likes of Sumit Sarkar, Romila Thapar, and R S Sugirtharajah—see the introduction to *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters* for references to Romila Thapar's positions regarding Hinduism and India and her incorporation within South Asian Christians' garbled theological discourse. Stopping here the parody of the jargon in which they write, they seem to not agree that Hinduism is either a true religion or that it is *sanatana*, eternal. They all agree that Hindus are defined by their geography as a heterogeneous people living beyond the Indus, and Christian scholars feel the huge forest-dwelling population are not Hindus—see the journal *Jivan*, issues of 2013–14, for a critique of Hindu efforts at inclusion. Therefore, for these people Hindu identities are just matters of simple mapping. By this logic, someone living in the US born to Christian parents cannot become a Hindu since Hindu intelligentsia cannot see Hinduism as either an open 'Hospitable' religion in the sense of Emmanuel Levinas.

According to them, other religions are definitely God-given by definition, these scholars maintain that Hinduism is just an accretion of staid beliefs, rituals, and weird mumbo-jumbo that serves to marginalise those who participate in this faith community. According to the leading lights of religious studies like Wendy Doniger and Kancha Ilaiah, author of the book *Why I am Not a Hindu*, Hinduism is an absurdity, for they have all scrutinized and judged Hindu faith and found it vacuous—but good enough to build their careers on!

It is against this rabidly anti-Hindu polemics that has vitiated Indian academics that the efforts of Rajbali Pandey must be situated. The text under review proves that Hindu rituals, the very way of *being in time*, that is, Hindu samskaras, are eternal and invest spatio-temporality to Hindu essences. Hindus, as a faith community, are essential first and then these samskaras validate their existence within time and space. The Hindu samskaras prove that they are part of that eternal Being who has become many. Their samskaras remind them that they are in fact children of that effulgent Being who is in all. Pandey's book detailing Hindu samskaras is a strong argument against forces that would determine Hindus as being purely historically constrained. Pandey resituates transcendence to millions of lives lived with fidelity to their Hindu patrimonies.

Hinduism is a celebration of life in the *here and the now*. Hindus do not live for another world to come; they are urged by their canonical scriptures to realize the Divine in the present moment. They do not hold that the *sarx* is fallen; nor do they hold that asceticism, for its own sake, has any value. Hindu faith celebrates, on the one hand, those who begin their journey into the knowledge of Brahman and on the other, those who having gained that knowledge

decide to marry and through their progeny pass on this divine wisdom gained by a direct experience. All these stages—the start of chaste studies to marriage—are explicated with a natural thoroughness by Pandey.

One very important observation made in this book needs to be extrapolated: at the end of Chapter 3 Pandey speaks of a real crisis in Hindu faith. The language of Hindu rituals and chants are not accessible to the commoner and thus seem abstruse to the ordinary tech-savvy Hindu. It is here that Hindus as a faith community must adopt and learn from one of the greatest religions of the world, which teetered at the edge of obsolescence near the middle of the last century. The average Roman Catholic did not understand a word of the Latin Mass being said throughout the globe by their clergy. The Second Vatican Council took a radical decision—they had scholars and scholarly committees translate the whole liturgy into vernaculars, and these are still being translated by experts into various indigenous languages. Bible scholars have of course to learn at least four languages: Hebrew, Latin, the two forms of Greek, and Aramaic. Roman Catholics worldwide now read the *Jerusalem Bible*, for instance when they want to theologize as Catholics. Hence that religion adapted itself and is able to proselytize—for instance, throughout India after Holy Mass, the parish priest or the Catholic nuns, say ‘Jai Jishu’ to everyone in India’s Hindi heartlands. If Hindus as a faith community have to reach out to others who are in imminent danger of being alienated from the Sanatana Dharma, they need to have experts of the calibre of Pandey, the late Swami Gambhiranandaji of the Ramakrishna Order, and scholarly monks of this and other Orders to engage in serious works of translation and linguistic assimilation of all Hindu samskaras into English and vernacular languages. The larger world can then understand directly Sanatana Dharma. If they wait that future generations will learn Sanskrit and then access Hindu canonical scriptures, then Pandey’s efforts will be in vain. This scholarly book has been published by one of the best publishers within the field of Indian studies, but does that mean that this book will help the tired IT professional at Bengaluru explain her faith to

a foreigner who might want to know why there is feasting after a Hindu death. If this Hindu sister is unable to explain this at that very moment, Hindu faith will be ridiculed by the likes of Ilaiah. And Pandey gives the reasons for a feast after a Hindu death, at the end of his scholarly tome. The need of the times is that Hindus immediately create greater accessibility to these kinds of works among the general populace. Pandey deserves to be known beyond the closed Indology group. Such texts, as this one under reviews, needs to be made accessible to all those who quest for their identities, including those of the Semitic religions. This book fends off attacks against the barbarians at our doors.

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***Bodhisattvas of the Forest
and the Formation of
the Mahāyāna***

Daniel Boucher

Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2011.
xxiv + 288 pp. ₹ 595.

Doctrines are the results of experiments involving tremendous sacrifice and, many a times, tremendous restraint. All major religious traditions have witnessed, in their formative years, enormous asceticism and spiritual disciplines causing bodily privation. It is such asceticism that gives a solid foundation to the tradition. Once the religious tradition is fairly established, often physical austerity takes a backstage. For this very reason, sometimes the best way to trace the roots of any tradition is to trace the physical austerities of the early masters of that path. While this is true, it is equally true that in many religious traditions the careful upkeep of the body has been prescribed to take away the mind from the body. Mahayana also has a rich past of carefully maintaining the physical body. The wonderful integration of asceticism and glorification of body in this tradition is an interesting study. Boucher has quite

successfully attempted this in the present book, which is a study of the *Rashtrapalapariprichchha Sutra* and is located in a time in the history of Mahayana tradition when its adherents were losing sight of the vision behind the asceticism of the early masters. Lack of discipline and abstinence from opulence had led to resentment among some monks who believed that the early austerities had to be rediscovered. This sounds similar to the need for more austerities felt by St Francis of Assisi or St Teresa of Avila. As he points out in the introduction, it is very difficult to trace the early history of Mahayana Buddhism. The social standings of the followers of this tradition, both monastic and lay, remain a mystery due to dearth of information. The author makes it clear that the approach to this study of the formation of the Mahayana tradition is mainly from the social perspective and not so much from the philosophical standpoint. Boucher, however, promises not to miss out on the religious connotations of the text. He not only keeps his promise but brings out an extraordinary portrayal of the religious practices and beliefs by a careful analysis of the text.

Virtue and the virtuous are often shown to have corresponding physical manifestations of their goodness. Boucher shows examples of this in the Mahayana tradition. He also shows us how these portrayals have been interwoven into popular lore, like the *Jātaka*. While the physical body is considered a gift, it is nonetheless restrained to attain perfection. This practice of the early Mahayana is brought out through numerous narratives where ascetic practices of the Mahayana forest-dwellers are outlined. It is interesting to note that the author quotes a Belgian text too, showing his mastery over many languages. We are given an account, both from the mainstream and Mahayana literature, of the *dhutagunas*, qualities of purification, or 'the traditional set of ascetic disciplines in both Mainstream and Mahayana literature that came to characterize, or rather standardize, the rigorous life of the forest-dwelling monk' (43). The ascetic practices are contrasted with their opposition and we are also given a chapter with 'A Critique of Sedentary Monasticism' (64). Early

Mahayana monks were quite vocal in their belief that the mainstream monastics had fallen from their path: 'A householder is not as covetous with passion as these [corrupt monks] are after going forth. They would have wives, sons, and daughters just like a householder' (65). Boucher tries to find the quality of relations among the members of Mahayana monastic communities. Such analysis points to the assumption that 'a given *nikāya* could tolerate different vocations and that monks of different stripes could cohabitate in the same monastery, presumably without conflict' (74).

A unique aspect of this book is that it ventures into an analysis of the extant translations of the *Rashtrapalapariprichchha Sutra*. Delineating the shortcomings of these translations, Boucher gives a new translation based on Sanskrit and Chinese texts of the sutra. We are reminded that translations differ not only because of the target language but also because of the milieu from which the translation is done. He explains the need for this new translation, as our understanding of the language of this early Mahayana text has been enriched a lot since the extant translations were published. Boucher devotes two chapters to the study of translations of early Mahayana texts in general, and the translation of the *Rashtrapalapariprichchha Sutra* in particular. He delves on the difficulties in translating such texts with reference to Indian and Chinese contexts. We are also given a detailed examination of the errors that could creep in, in the form of 'Mistranslations and Missed Translations' (101). This Boucher shows by comparing different translations and citing particular instances. All this analysis makes the book valuable not only to the student of Buddhism but also to anyone interested in translation studies.

The new annotated translation of the *Rashtrapalapariprichchha Sutra* is lucid and an easy read. Boucher deserves praise for retaining the original ethos in the English idiom. He clearly reserves his place among the rare breed of scholars, who are also masters of language. The text consists of the questions of *Rashtrapala* concerning various topics ranging from 'The Glorification of the Buddha' to 'The Degeneration of the True Dharma'.

The narrative is anecdotal and employs numerous similes and metaphors. The language is direct like everyday parlance. The behaviour of the illumined, the way of austerity, and the responses of the followers to the teachings of the Dharma, are some flowers of this garden of wisdom.

Almost a half of the book is devoted to copious notes and references. These notes help us locate the text and its various contexts. It is interesting to note that Chinese expressions are given in the original script, thus creating additional value for Chinese readers. The bibliography is exhaustive and could serve the purpose of an extensive reading list on early Mahayana Buddhism. A very important aspect of this work is that Boucher keeps drawing parallels to other religions and religious traditions. He refers to ascetic practices in the early history of various religious traditions. This volume is a marvellous sociological and historical analysis of the body of Rashtrapalapariprichchha Sutra as a representative of the tradition of the recurring themes of the glorification of the body and asceticism in Buddhism.

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The Journal of Oriental Research, Madras, 2010-2012

Eds. Dr V Kameswari,
Dr K S Balasubramanian, and
Dr TV Vasudeva

The Kuppaswami Sastri Research Institute, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004.
2011. viii + 190 pp. ₹ 250.

The *Journal of Oriental Research* was started in 1927 by Prof. S Kuppaswami Sastri, who was also the founder of the Kuppaswami Sastri Research Institute. Originally an annual journal, its regularity has been disturbed due to financial difficulties. The present issue comprises volumes eighty-three to eighty-four and has been funded by the Dr V Raghavan Memorial Endowment.

The first article is on 'Jainism and Anthologies', which critically analyses numerous anthologies with brevity and clarity. In 'Sanskrit as the Basis of World Languages' we are shown how Sanskrit has influenced all language families.

This is followed by a masterly exposition of some instances of love-symbolism in Tamil and Sanskrit devotional literature in 'The Cuṇaiyāṭal—Brahmānubhava Equation'. Then comes the paper on 'Māgha and Astrology', where the writings of Magha are shown to have insights into astrology. 'Yoga Darśana and Advaita' shows how exponents of both Yoga and Advaita Vedanta have respected the other philosophy and have also advocated a world view based on them. In 'Technical Methods and Metrical Modifications in *Vāṇibhūṣaṇa* of Dāmodara Miśra' the author gives a brief analysis of a work on *vrīttas*, metrics. One is baffled by the mathematical precision of the various metres in Sanskrit prosody.

The next article is 'An Introduction to the Pāṇinīya-Sūtradāharaṇa-Kāvya', which includes an explanation. We get a glimpse of the astrological works of Parashara in 'Parāśara and His Works'. The text of *Govindashtaka* by Shankaracharya is analysed with reference to Advaita philosophy, with a translation of the gloss by Ānandagiri in 'Advaita Concepts as Gleaned from the Gloss of Ānandagiri on *Govindashtaka*'. We also find a comparative study in 'Bhartṛhari and Bacon: A Comparative Study in Moral Philosophy'. A particular kind of Sanskrit play is analysed in 'Unmattarāghava of Virūpākṣa—A Prekṣaṇaka'. The nature of a class of ascetics is portrayed in 'A Note on Pṛśnis'. The culmination of yoga lies in the dissolution of the mind. The path to attain this is studied on the basis of a text by Gorakshanatha in 'Amanaskayoga—The Yoga Bereft of Mind'. The concepts of *paratattva* and *jiva* are discussed here. There is a section for book reviews at the end of the volume, of books of serious research on Indian philosophy and Sanskrit studies. There is also a section for obituaries, where the reader knows about some luminaries in Indian studies.

This journal proves once again that writings in Sanskrit need not necessarily be religious or philosophical. It is really a pity that the Institute is unable to bring this journal annually. Taking in the marvellous contents of the journal, the reader automatically prays for its immediate revival as an unbroken annual journal.

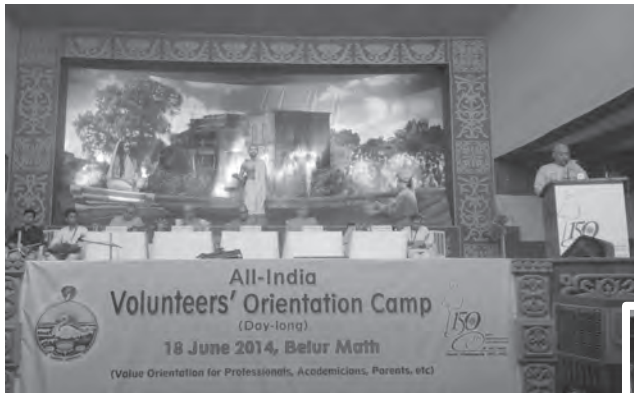
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REPORTS

Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda

Headquarters: An all-India convention of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Bhava Prachar Parishads was held at Belur Math on 16 and 17 June. Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Srimat Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj, Vice Presidents, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Swami Gautamananda, Adhyaksha, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, and the General Secretary chaired the different sessions. About 1,400 delegates representing the different Bhava Prachar Parishads and their member-ashramas took part in the convention. An all-India volunteers' orientation camp

All-India Volunteers' Orientation Camp



All-India Convention of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Bhava Prachar Parishads

several monks and a few selected delegates spoke.

Besides, the following centres held various programmes to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Swamiji.

Delhi: Thirty-one puppet shows in north-eastern states from 1 March to 9 April. A three-day value education programme for 76 teachers at Shivpuri, Madhya Pradesh, on 25, 26, and 27 June.

Hyderabad: A three-day value-orientation youth camp from 27 to 29 June which was attended by 267 youths.

Puri Mission: A classical music programme, vocal and instrumental, on 8 June which was attended by about 350 people.

Swamiji's Ancestral House, Kolkata: Two public meetings on 27 May and 18 June in which altogether 700 people took part.

On the centre's initiative, a public meeting was held at Kalighat temple, Kolkata, on 28 May which was attended by 500 people.

On 25 May, **Japan** centre held the concluding function of Swami Vivekananda's

was held at Belur Math on 18 June in which about 2,400 volunteers associated with Belur Math and branch centres participated. The General Secretary delivered the welcome address and Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Srimat Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj, and Swami Gautamananda presided over a session each in which





150th birth anniversary celebration, comprising speeches and cultural programmes, which was attended by about 400 people. Swami Suhitanda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, the Ambassadors of India and Nepal to Japan, and some other distinguished speakers including Christian and Buddhist priests addressed the gathering. A few books related to Swami Vivekananda and a special issue of the centre's bimonthly magazine were also released.

New Vice President

Srimat Swami Vagishanandaji Maharaj has been elected a Vice President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission with effect from 9 June.

New Trustees

Swamis Abhiramananda and Muktidananda have been appointed trustees of the Ramakrishna

Math and members of the governing body of the Ramakrishna Mission.

News of Branch Centres

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Guwahati conducted a free medical camp during Ambuvachi Mela near Kamakhya Temple from 22 to 25 June in which about 4600 patients were treated. Swami Gautamananda inaugurated the Vivekananda Cultural Centre at Vivekananda House, under **Ramakrishna Math, Chennai** on 2 May.



The following centres conducted summer camps for students, which included activities like chanting, bhajans, moral lessons, yogasanas, and others: **Chennai Mission Ashrama**, from 4 to 25 May, attended by 63 children; **Hyderabad**, from 27 April to 25 May, attended by 150 children; **Porbandar**, from 1 to 31 May, attended by 80 children, and **Rajkot**, from 5 to 30 May, attended by 75 children.

Relief

Drought Relief • **Khetri** centre distributed 2,00,000 l of drinking water from 29 May to 25 June among 600 families facing acute water scarcity.

Flood Relief • **Dehradun** centre distributed 1,045 mattresses, 52 cushions, 1,500 pants and 500 tracksuits among the flood-affected families from 8 to 29 March.

Summer Relief • The following centres distributed buttermilk to wayfarers in the month of May. **Chennai Mission Ashrama**: 21,000 l; **Pune**: 21,700 l; **Salem**: 6,000 l.

